



CASE STUDIES

Towards food policies that support healthy and sustainable consumption

Case studies from 11 European countries
highlighting good practices for
demand-side policies



Imprint

Please cite each individual case study and their author(s)

Case studies

Towards food policies that support healthy and sustainable consumption. Case studies from 11 European countries highlighting good practices for demand-side policies.

Accompanying report to

Agora Agriculture and IDDRI (2025): Towards national food policies that support healthy and sustainable consumption. Country case studies and the role of EU food policy.

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Introduction

This report gathers analyses of demand-side food policies in 11 European countries. It is associated with the policy paper titled "Towards food policies that support healthy and sustainable consumption. Country case studies and the role of the EU food policy", which highlights the relevance of demand-side food policies and aims to inform national policymakers in the member states and at EU level about their potential. The policy paper draws lessons from a review of the literature on integrated food policies. In addition, policy experts from research institutions in eleven European countries conducted an analysis of food strategies and policies in their respective countries (see Table 1).

While the policy paper highlights key insights from the country case studies, this report includes the full case studies. Each case study provides background information on the country's progress towards better coordinated, thus integrated food policy and focuses on one to three examples of demand-side measures. The countries and policy examples have been selected to highlight positive examples from different European regions and to cover a wide range of approaches to demand-side food policies and specific measures. The list of countries is composed of nine EU member states – Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, The Netherlands – plus Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

The report aims to help policymakers and stakeholders in Member States considering the development of demand-side food policies by providing a better overview of relevant and effective policies, useful processes as well as success factors and barriers. The case studies:

- provide a brief overview of how food policies and priorities have evolved in each country
- explain the extent to which each country has worked towards and agreed on a national food strategy and action plan and the extent to which it is a more holistic strategy or focused on specific issues and measures
- describe who was involved in the development of relevant food policies and what lessons can be learned from stakeholder involvement
- describe a selection of policies, value chain interventions or policymaking processes that can serve as inspiration or positive examples for different aspects of an integrated food policy
- refer to what is known about the impact of the measures and discuss what lessons can be transferred to other countries.

The focus of these case studies is on demand-side food policies, i.e. policies that have a direct or indirect impact on food practices through changes in the food environment. Policies fostering such food environments not only enhance food-related competences but also improve availability, affordability and appeal of healthy and sustainable options. This includes reducing food waste and promoting healthy and sustainable diets. Fair food environments are key to changing food consumption patterns, as highlighted in multiple reports and as analysed in the policy paper.

In this respect, the policies examined in this report cover issues ranging from health and sustainability standards in public food procurement, reducing food waste through a public private partnership, food assistance in the form of subsidised restaurants, to funding alternative proteins, and improving food system monitoring. The case studies also include good examples of citizen participation processes, involvement of local actors and stakeholder consultations.

The case studies do not, however, provide an overview of all food policy in each country. This means that while some policy items are highlighted in the case studies, the countries may be (and in many cases are) active in many other policy areas.

Although there is a degree of heterogeneity between the case studies due to the different country contexts, each case study follows a similar approach: At the beginning of each case study, a table summarises the country's overall progress towards an integrated food policy and highlights the focus areas addressed. The text then starts with a more general overview of how food policy has evolved in the country, highlighting key actors and institutions and summarising the extent to which the country has taken steps towards a food strategy and/or integrated food policy. Each case study then provides a description of between one and three policy instruments or processes that can be considered as positive examples and also provides insights into the impact of the policies.

Table 1 below summarises the eleven case studies in terms of countries, contributing partners/authors and focus areas.

Case study focus areas of the policy brief and contributing partners

→ Table 1

Country	Contributing partner	Good practice policies analysed
France	IDDR	– Sustainability in public food procurement – Social policy: greening food aid and developing alternatives
Germany	Agora Agriculture	– Developing a food strategy: building momentum – Support for alternative proteins
Netherlands	Wageningen University & Research / WUR	– Food loss and waste reduction – Alternative proteins
Finland	Demos Helsinki	– National food strategy iterations – A public health intervention using a community approach: the North Karelia Project
Denmark	Concito	– Dietary guidelines for health and climate – Climate data in procurement and labelling – Promotion of plant-based foods and alternative proteins
Poland	Green Economy Institute / IZG	– Health policy interventions: sugar tax and junk food ban in schools and kindergartens – Social policy for combating food poverty
Portugal	University of Évora / MED	– Mandatory vegetarian options in public canteens
Sweden	Stockholm Environment Institute / SEI	– Free and more sustainable meals in schools – Organic food in public procurement
Spain	BC3	– Food Chain Law – 0% VAT on fruit and vegetables – Food Waste Law
UK (Non-EU)	IEEP UK	– Process of setting up recommendations for a food strategy – Dietary policy addressing obesity: soft drink levy and restrictions on the promotion of food high in fat, salt and/or sugar – Regional and local food policy
Switzerland (Non-EU)	ETH Zurich	– Involving experts and citizens to formulate integrated food policy recommendations

Case study #1: Denmark

Michael Minter, Anna Bach Johansen and Simone Højte (CONCITO) | November 2024

SUMMARY

Development of national food policy and food strategy

Denmark's food policy consists of several independent but related food policy initiatives led by the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries. There is no comprehensive food strategy. Since the 1990s, food policy has focused on promoting organic products, food safety, health and animal welfare. In the 2020s, the climate and land use impacts of food have emerged as an important issue in promoting sustainable food production and consumption, with recent initiatives including climate-informed dietary guidelines, the use of climate data in public procurement and the promotion of plant-based foods.

Focus area 1 – Dietary guidelines for health and climate

In 2021, new dietary guidelines were released that set a maximum of 350 grams/week for meat consumption, including poultry, and encourage eating “plant-rich”. The guidelines have been developed against a strong scientific background using both the Nordic Nutrition Recommendations and the adapted EAT-Lancet diet, integrating a focus on both health and climate.

Focus area 2 – Climate data in procurement and labelling

Climate data is increasingly being used by public and private institutions in the food service industry as a tool to identify and cut sources of greenhouse gas emissions. Cities and companies have set emission reduction targets. The central public procurement organisation SKI has introduced a set of environmental and social requirements for food procurement and the government has decided to develop a voluntary, state-controlled climate label.

Focus area 3 – Promotion of plant-based foods and alternative proteins

As part of the 2021 agreement on a green transition of the agricultural sector, the Danish government has earmarked 170 million euros between 2022 and 2030 for the development of plant-based foods. It includes a 91-million euro multi-annual grant (the first round of which was issued in early 2023), a strategy for green proteins for food and feed (published in 2023) as well as support for a farm-level eco-scheme. In addition, the government has developed and published an Action Plan for Plant-based Foods in 2023. The Action Plan announces various initiatives (education of kitchen professionals, research and innovation, subsidy schemes for production, etc.) but does not include a quantified objective for the promotion of plant-based foods.

Content: Denmark

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1 Introduction

Denmark's food policy is made up of several independent but related food policy initiatives. The national food policies are generally led by the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries in cooperation with relevant authorities, e.g. under the Ministries of Environment, Health, and Business.

Since the 1990s, Denmark's food policy has focused on the promotion of organic products, food safety, health and animal welfare. These priorities are reflected in the various official or public-private food labelling schemes that have been introduced since then.¹

In the 2010s, the climate and land use impact of food emerged as an important additional topic in promoting sustainable food production and consumption.

Although Denmark does not have a national food strategy, this has not hindered progress in food policy integration, particularly when it comes to promoting healthy and sustainable diets through both demand- and supply-side measures. To illustrate this progress, this case study explores three examples: the reform of the official dietary guidelines to include both health and climate objectives, the use of climate data in food procurement and labelling and the promotion of plant-based foods and alternative proteins.

2 Official dietary guidelines for health and climate

In 2021, the Veterinary and Food Administration in Denmark launched new [Danish Official Dietary Guidelines](#) (Danish Veterinary and Food Administration, 2021), to guide Danes on how to eat a diet that is both healthier and more climate-friendly. For instance, it has lowered the previous recommendations for meat from max. 500 grams per week excluding poultry to max. 350 grams per week including poultry and introduced a recommendation for the intake of prepared legumes at 100 grams per day besides the recommended daily intake of 600 grams of vegetables and fruits. The general recommendation is to eat "less meat", "plant-rich, varied and not too much".

2.1 Process and context

The guidelines have been developed on a strong evidence base through research by the [Danish Technical University](#), using the [Nordic Nutrition Recommendations](#) (NNR) as well as the [EAT-Lancet diet](#) adapted to a Danish context and food culture.

The development process was initiated in 2020 under leadership of the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration. The work was based on a scientific evidence report *Guidance for sustainable healthy diets – Scientific background for revising the Danish food-based dietary guidelines* published by the National Food Institute at the Technical University of Denmark (DTU) (Lassen A. D., Christensen, L. M., Fagt, S., Trolle, E., 2020).

¹ Denmark introduced a state-controlled organic label in 1990 and an organic cuisine label was introduced in 2009. The Smiley food safety control label for shops and restaurants was introduced in 2001, the Nordic Keyhole health label, a Danish whole grain label, was introduced in 2009 and the official animal welfare label in 2017.

The development process involved workshops and dialogue with a broad range of stakeholders including the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, the Ministry of Climate, Energy and Utilities, the Danish Health Authority, the National Food Institute at the Technical University of Denmark, consumer organisations, non-governmental organisations as well as the food and retail industry. The development process also included a pre-test to assess the understanding and interpretation of the dietary guidelines among Danish consumers.

In 2023, a new version of the Nordic Nutrition Recommendations (NNR) was published with updated values for nutrient requirements as well as advice for the intake of different food groups, which also integrates environmental sustainability (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2023). The Danish official dietary guidelines were updated in 2024 to be in accordance with NNR 2023. The recommendations for the intake of dairy products were adjusted to 250–350 ml milk products per day, depending on age.

The dietary guidelines are endorsed by the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries and several municipalities and regions have included the official dietary guidelines in their local food procurement policies.

2.2 Potential impact

According to an assessment by the think tank CONCITO on [Denmark's global consumption-based emissions](#), Danes have one of the largest climate footprints from food consumption globally, with a climate footprint of 2.5 tonnes CO₂ equivalents (CO₂e) per capita which is 20% of the total per capita footprint (Minter, M., Jensen, C. L., Chrintz, T., 2023). In a report on [Climate-friendly food and consumer behaviour](#), the Danish Climate Council has estimated that Danes on average could reduce the climate impact of their food consumption by up to 45% if they followed the dietary guidelines instead of the current average dietary patterns (Danish Council on Climate Change, 2022).

2.3 Barriers to adopting the climate-friendly dietary guidelines in Denmark

The official dietary guidelines generally have broad support among Danish businesses and stakeholders. Despite this support, the average Danish diet is still far from meeting the guidelines, which represents a substantial challenge in changing dietary habits and food culture. Denmark is still one of the countries with the highest per capita meat consumption. While the majority of Danes want to eat a more climate-friendly diet, they find the shift towards more plant-based foods challenging (*Madkulturen*, 2022).

Since the launch, the official dietary guidelines have mainly been promoted through information and education materials, webinars and campaigns. There are no national regulatory measures to implement the new dietary guidelines.

3 Climate data in food procurement and labelling

Climate data can be an impactful tool to promote climate-friendly food choices among food retail and food service professionals. In the 2020s, an increasing number of public institutions and private actors in the food service industry have voluntarily introduced targets and started monitoring the climate footprint of their procurement and meals. A public climate database and climate labelling scheme for food products in retail is currently under development.

3.1 Use of climate data in public procurement of food

In Denmark, around 650 000 public meals are served every day. Changing public meals to be more climate-friendly and attractive can have a significant impact on Denmark's climate footprint and help overcome barriers to dietary change, such as taste preference and habits (Danish Climate Council, 2022). The City of Copenhagen was one of the first Danish public institutions to set a food-related greenhouse gas reduction target consistent with the Paris Climate Agreement in its 2019 food strategy based on emission factors and a feasibility study by the World Resources Institute (WRI). The target was to reduce the carbon footprint of public meals in the City of Copenhagen as a whole by at least 25% per capita by 2025 (City of Copenhagen, 2019).

Since the launch of the Big Climate Database by the green think tank CONCITO in 2021, many more public institutions and food service actors have introduced greenhouse gas reduction targets, monitoring, education and information on their food procurement and meals. A 2023 CONCITO study on the use of the database in public kitchens shows that several public institutions are now working to reduce the climate footprint of public meals, and 42 municipalities were planning to introduce climate calculations in the next few years. 9 out of 13 public institutions covered in the study perform climate calculations with direct or indirect use of The Big Climate Database. The other 4 institutions use lifecycle assessment data from WRI's climate calculator, Mindful Food Solutions, the Swedish RISE database and Aarhus University (Minter, M., Baunhøj, A., 2023).

The Danish State and Municipal Procurement Service SKI (*Staten og Kommunernes Indkøbsservice*) is a central procurement organisation that offers procurement services to the Danish public sector on commercial terms. The new 2024 food procurement agreement set out environmental and social requirements and introduced mechanisms to support more sustainable food procurement (SKI, 2024). This includes a requirement for the supplier to make the climate footprint visible both at product level and on the customer's shopping basket. At the request of the customer, the supplier shall also prepare a climate statement of the customer's total climate footprint for the procurement under the framework agreement according to a recognised LCA calculation methodology. The ranking of the climate impact of the different food products in the SKI agreement is based on the Big Climate Database. The SKI agreement's expected annual turnover of approximately 130 million euros represents approximately 1% of the total wholesale food market and around 20% of the public food market.

3.2 Introduction of a state-controlled climate label

In 2022, it was decided that Denmark would introduce a voluntary state-controlled climate label (Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries of Denmark, 2022). The label should ensure that there is a common climate label that consumers can trust and that the food industry will use widely. Denmark already has an organic label, a nutrition label and an animal welfare label, but no climate label.

Many Danes are willing to eat a more climate-friendly diet but report that they lack information on the climate impact of foods (Forbrugerrådet Tænk, 2021). A climate label will complement other food labels and choice-editing initiatives and may help consumers, retailers and food producers shift towards a more climate-friendly direction. 2.9 million euros have been earmarked to develop the climate label between 2022 and 2026.

The decision was partly inspired by a test by a Danish retailer in 2021 of a simple climate labelling scheme based on the results of The Big Climate Database, with positive responses from customers and a significant impact on purchases. For example, the sale of beef decreased by 4% and the sale of sliced meats by 6% compared to other stores without climate labelling (Salling Group, 2021). The government established a working group

with market actors and NGOs to agree on the design of the climate labelling scheme (Danish Veterinary and Food Administration, 2022). Based on the recommendations from the working group, the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration is currently working to establish a public database and a climate label.

4 Promotion of plant-based foods and alternative proteins

With the broad political agreement on a green transition of the agricultural sector from October 2021, Denmark has planned public investments of 170 million euros to advance plant-based foods between 2022 and 2030 (Ministry of Food Agriculture and Fisheries of Denmark, 2021). The agriculture agreement enjoyed strong bipartisan support – 98% of the Danish MPs supported it. The agreement should ensure that the agriculture and forestry sector in Denmark delivers a substantial contribution to the national target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 70% by 2030, which is stated in the Danish Climate Act (Danish Ministry of Climate, Energy and Utilities, 2020). It contains a binding climate target for the agriculture and forestry sector of 55–65% by 2030 compared to 1990 emissions.

The investments of the agreement on a green transition of the agricultural sector are focused on three main initiatives:

- 91 million euros for the Plant-Based Food Grant (*Plantefonden*) which supports projects that aim to strengthen the value chain and develop the sector for plant-based foods (Plant Based Food Grant, 2023)
- 35 million euros to develop a Danish strategy for green proteins for animals and humans, both for human consumption and animal feed, covering plant-based protein as well as biological technologies (Ministry of Food Agriculture and Fisheries of Denmark, 2023a)
- 78 million euros for the five-year eco-scheme for diversified plant production, which pays bonuses to Danish farmers who grow certain crops, including plant-based protein crops (Danish Agricultural Agency, 2024).

In addition, the agriculture agreement committed the government to create a national action plan for plant-based food, which was developed by the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries (Ministry of Food Agriculture and Fisheries of Denmark, 2023b).

Together these initiatives aim to strengthen the green transition of the agri-food sector, improve the Danish water environment and ensure more space for nature, while taking into account the competitiveness of the agricultural sector, jobs and social balance. Today there is a widespread political consensus that promoting a more plant-based food production and consumption is necessary for reaching environmental goals and promoting public health. It is also regarded as an important business opportunity for Danish farmers and the food processing industry. While information initiatives and economic support enjoy broad political support, actual regulation of food consumption in professional kitchens and private households is more controversial.

4.1 The Plant-Based Food Grant (Plantefonden)

The organisation and establishment of the Plant-Based Food Grant was agreed by the parties to the agreement on a green transition of the agricultural sector in March 2022 and the law on the grant was adopted

unanimously by Parliament in February 2023.² The first round of grants was announced in November 2023, with 8 million euros granted to 36 projects. The second round of grants was announced in August 2024, with 17 million euros granted to 35 projects. There was a substantial over-application with 101 projects applying for 45 million euros. The political agreement on the implementation of the Danish Green Tripartite Agreement from November 2024 included an additional budget for the Plant-Based Food Grant and increased the total budget for the period of 2025–2030 to 140 million euros (Ministry for Green Tripartite, 2024).

The grant can, among other things, support development activities such as crop development, cultivation, processing, sales promotion, education and knowledge dissemination. They may be allocated to businesses, organisations and research and knowledge dissemination institutions. It is intended that at least half of the grant's funds are used for projects related to organic plant-based foods. The selected strategic development areas of the grant are: stimulating demand, stimulating supply and building sectoral bridges across the value chain of production and consumption. Evaluation of the grant's effect is pending.

4.2 Action plan and strategy for plant-based foods and green proteins

In October 2023, the Danish government published an [Action Plan for Plant-Based Foods](#). The plan focuses broadly on initiatives along the food value chain, including subsidy schemes for production, networking and support for start-ups, training for culinary professionals, strengthening export markets and research and innovation. There are no measurable targets for the promotion of plant-based foods or requirements for, for example, public kitchens to serve more plant-based foods or to reduce the climate footprint of their procurement.

The government's [Strategy for green proteins for animals and humans](#) was presented in December 2023.³ The Strategy shows how green proteins can support the shift towards plant-based food production, replace imported soy for animal feed and provide alternative income opportunities for Danish farmers and companies through shifts in crops and new technologies. The strategy identifies green biorefinery of grasses, legumes and novel foods as optimal focus areas and describes several activities and support schemes to promote them.

Both the green protein strategy and the action plan for plant-based foods are still too new to evaluate their effects. Nevertheless, these initiatives illustrate a political commitment in Denmark, with support for both traditional proteins like legumes and high-tech alternatives such as cultivated meat and precision fermentation. In addition to the political support, Denmark has strong industrial actors leading innovation in alternative proteins and developing biological technologies for agriculture and the food industry.

4.3 The eco-scheme for diversified plant production

Eco-schemes are new instruments in the 2023–27 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) which, through area-based payments, reward farmers who voluntarily adopt more environmentally sustainable practices. The Danish eco-scheme on Diversified Plant Production is one of the public investments aimed at increasing the production of plant-based food products, leveraging funds from the CAP to support the production of plant-based foods as part of a coherent value chain approach.

2 The law on the grant defines plant-based foods as all foods derived from plants, edible fungi, algae and beneficial micro-organisms, including both unprocessed and processed raw materials and ingredients, including those combined with enzymes and other non-animal ingredients suitable for food production.

3 Green proteins are defined as alternative proteins that support a supply chain that avoids or limits the emission of greenhouse gases compared to conventional proteins (soy for animal feed and animal products) and that are produced with more consideration for nature and biodiversity. This includes plant-based, cellular and fermentation proteins.

However, an [evaluation of its implementation in 2023](#) has shown that this eco-scheme has not had the desired effect but has mainly functioned as compensation to the starch potato and sugar beet sectors for the financial loss these sectors experienced due to the new CAP reform. In fact, the evaluation of the scheme showed, that only 13% of the funding has been used for legumes, vegetables and herbs for human consumption and that the production of those crops decreased by 12% from 2022 to 2023, mainly due to the closing of a green pea processing factory (Højte, S., Johansen, A. B., Fraas, E., Flatz, J., 2024).

This highlights the importance of strengthening the whole value chain for plant-based foods, incentivising production by ensuring demand, processing and marketing opportunities, and confirms the key role of the Plant-Based Food Grant.

A way forward for the implementation of this Danish eco-scheme in the coming years could be to make the list of crops eligible for the scheme more targeted by excluding crops for industrial purposes and focusing the scheme on legumes for human consumption, nuts, fruits and berries, mushrooms, herbs and vegetables. This could be combined with support schemes in pillar II, directed towards rural projects for marketing, processing, retail and increasing demand for plant-based foods.

5 Conclusion

These three examples illustrate several important food policy initiatives in Denmark, aimed at integrating climate and land-use impacts in the food system transformation and advancing plant-based diets and the production of green proteins. The cases highlight the importance of comprehensive food policy initiatives that encompass the entire value chain. Adequate funding and investment as well as coordinated policies are crucial for supporting substantial changes in food systems and diets. Overcoming barriers to dietary change and developing the retail market for plant-based foods are also essential steps.

While Denmark's approach demonstrates that targeted investments, strategies and the use of climate data can promote sustainable food systems, the initiatives are still new and there are no studies yet that specify their impact.

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Case study #2: Finland

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November 2024

SUMMARY

Development of national food policy and food strategy

The Finnish government published the first National Food Strategy (for 2030) in 2010, which was updated in 2016. It aimed to improve competitiveness, promote healthy diets and combine support for domestic production with demand-side measures through a more comprehensive food policy. The development of the strategy was led by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and promoted greater cross-sectoral collaboration between administrations, as a first step towards a more integrated food policy. In 2023, the government set up a working group to develop a third National Food Strategy (for 2040), with a stronger focus on domestic food production, but also with the aim of incorporating sustainable development in a comprehensive and up-to-date manner. In practice, however, food policy remains rather siloed in different policy domains.

Focus area 1 –

A public health intervention using a community approach: the North Karelia Project

The North Karelia Project was launched in 1972 as a public health intervention aimed at reducing the consumption of products high in saturated fats, increasing fruit and vegetable intake and halting smoking in this Finnish region. It employed a community-based strategy that combined interventions on social structures such as local opinion leaders and workers (norms), collaboration with the food industry (supply) as well as extensive educational campaigns (information) to promote new consumption habits. Strong institutional and political support and the connection to national-level policy development ensured the programme's sustainability before its nation-wide extension.

Content: Finland

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1 Introduction

The Finnish government published the first National Food Strategy in 2010, prepared under the leadership of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. It was updated in 2016. The understanding of and demand for integrated food policies has increased through the efforts undertaken as part of these strategies. In practice, however, food policy is mainly shaped by individual policy domains such as agriculture, competition and consumer policy, rural development and public health. Since 2024, a second strategy revision is under way.

This case study further explores the extent to which the National Food Strategy (including its second iteration) has succeeded in better integrating food policies, as well as the governance structures and processes that have been put in place to develop it further. We then look at the North Karelia project – the world's first public health project for the prevention of cardiovascular disease mortality – as a best-practice example of a demand-side intervention that has been successful in promoting sustained behavioural change, with many lessons transferrable to promoting the uptake of a plant-based diet.

2 Contribution of the National Food Strategy to a better integration of food policies

In the early 2000s, global trade, climate change, environmental concerns and local food production challenges prompted Finland to adopt a more comprehensive food policy approach (Kugelberg et al., 2021). In 2009, the Prime Minister's Office commissioned a working group, led by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, to assess the food system and propose a National Food Strategy. Stakeholders, including marketing experts, chefs and industry representatives, were consulted. The resulting first Finnish food strategy *Food for Tomorrow 2030* (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2010), published in 2010, aimed to connect production and demand-side actions, promoted climate adaptation in agriculture and healthy diets as well as emphasising collaboration among stakeholders to ensure successful implementation. The government accepted the implementation strategy with prioritised focus areas: 1) ensuring the competitiveness and sustainability of Finland's food sector, 2) improving traceability, 3) supporting consumer-driven research, development and innovation and collaboration with the private sector, 4) promoting food education, healthy diets and organic local foods and developing responsible procurement and 5) improving inter-ministerial cooperation in food policy (Finnish Government, 2010). This led to the first major recognition of food policy as a government priority and it was also explicitly placed onto the agenda of the Ministry of Agriculture (Kurunmäki et al., 2012). However, implementation faltered. While the strategy identified actions and responsible actors, it lacked timelines, funding and governance structures. Implementation was limited to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry's initiatives, such as expanding food production, improving sustainability and promoting organic and local food, though collaboration among administrative branches increased.

In 2015, a Food Policy Committee, chaired by the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, was established to promote cross-sector governance and collaboration on food-related goals and policy (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 29.6.2016). The Committee included representatives from various ministries, farmers' unions, trade associations, environmental groups and researchers. Its goal was to coordinate food-related policies and update the National Food Strategy.

The Committee was also tasked with updating the 2010 National Food Strategy. This resulted in the publication of the Food 2030 strategy in 2016 (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2016). This was an attempt to balance market growth objectives with other priorities, such as reducing non-communicable diseases (NCDs), reflecting the long-standing focus in Finland's public health approach since the North Karelia Project (see below). It also emphasised the role of sustainable, healthy diets in the prevention of NCDs and the need to promote food culture, education and local vitality through food production.

Compared to its first iteration, the updated strategy advocated for a more integrated approach to food policy. A participatory approach in building the strategy helped bridge administrative silos and stakeholders' perspectives. However, no additional funding was provided for the implementation of the strategy. Again, it lacked specific targets, timelines and responsible actors for the measures included. The absence of rigorous monitoring and evaluation limited the ability of ministries to push for more coordinated action beyond the government's term of office. This impaired implementation, as both external actors and those working within the administration lacked the incentives – whether voluntary, economic or legislative – to act together to make the strategy a reality. Despite its potential to act as a convening and governing body for the development of a more integrated food policy and the implementation of the national food strategy, the Food Policy Committee was disbanded after one governmental term due to shifting political priorities. At the time of writing, no evaluation of the Committee has been published.

Although the attempts fell short of implementation, the strategies led to various initiatives that attempted to employ a more integrated approach to food policy and prepared the ground for future strategy updates. Key examples include the 2023 proposal for a Climate Food Programme to both reduce the climate footprint of food and improve public understanding of food production; the first national evaluation of Finland's food policy and food environment with proposals for measures to develop the national food environment to support health, by the Finnish Institute of Health and Wellbeing (Mäki et al., 2022); and the roadmap by the Natural Resources Institute of Finland for promoting plant-based protein production to improve economic growth, health and security of supply (Jansik et al., 2024).

2.1 Towards a new strategy

In 2023, a new government committed to strengthening the national vision and enhancing the appreciation of agricultural producers by developing a long-term strategy for domestic food production in parliamentary cooperation (Finnish Government, 2023). This is the third attempt to create a National Food Strategy that would unite both public and private actors around a shared vision for developing the Finnish food system from production to consumption by 2040. A cross-sectoral working group has been formed to develop the strategy and an action plan for implementation by 2027. Although the governmental programme focuses on domestic food production, the process is seen as an opportunity to push for a more integrated approach to food policy in Finland by a wide range of stakeholders in the food system participating in the process.

In November 2024, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry completed a public online consultation for stakeholders to gather feedback about draft objectives and visions for an updated food strategy. The draft emphasised the development of a national food system that is sustainable and prioritises both fair economic practices and national well-being. It also highlights the importance of Finnish food culture as a competitive advantage and underscores the role of cross-sectoral research and innovation within the food sector. (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 1.11.2024.) Moving forward, these ideas provide a framework for the development of the strategy, although the success of the process will depend on the extent to which the lessons learned so far will actually be utilised in its execution.

2.2 Conclusions

To conclude, Finland's experience with its National Food Strategy highlights the importance of the following factors when aiming to develop an integrated food policy through national food strategies:

- Creating structures for cross-branch collaboration and governance to bridge administrative siloes
- Building genuine and broad stakeholder participation throughout the policy cycle
- Developing clear and actionable plans with defined measurable targets, timelines, adequate funding, governance models and robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

3 A public health intervention using a community approach: the North Karelia Project

The North Karelia Project, launched in 1972 in Finland's eastern region of North Karelia, stands as a pioneering public health intervention aimed at tackling the region's alarmingly high rates of cardiovascular disease (CVD). During the late 1960s, Finland faced a growing public health crisis, with CVD mortality rates among the highest in the world, particularly in North Karelia. The situation garnered significant public and media attention, prompting local officials to petition the Finnish government for support. The Finnish Heart Association convened a special working group to form the basic plan for the North Karelia Project that took the form of a community-based intervention strategy targeting the entire local population. (Karvonen, 2009)

The project, initially a five-year pilot, focused on the prevention of CVD through broad health promotion and policies based on medical knowledge through coordinated community action. Its success in North Karelia led to the expansion of the project nationwide. The project's rigorous scientific evaluation ensured that its strategies could be adapted and applied beyond the pilot region, influencing national policy and providing valuable lessons for international public health initiatives. (Puska et al., 2011; Oppenheimer et al., 2011)

3.1 Project approach

At the outset, the diet of the region was characterised by high consumption of saturated fats, particularly from dairy products, which were culturally and economically important for a significant proportion of the population, and by smoking. To address this, the project focused on promoting behaviour changes that would reduce the intake of these fats while promoting healthier alternatives, such as vegetable oils, and increasing the consumption of local fruits, berries and vegetables. With the ultimate goal of reducing CVD within the community by changing lifestyles, the project's strategy involved a multi-faceted approach that included community engagement, collaboration with the food industry and media, mobilisation of politicians and pushing for supportive policy measures. (Puska, 2016; Baril, 2013)

The Project employed a **community-based intervention strategy** that targeted the population's lifestyle and social structures. It was grounded in a rigorous approach to monitoring and evaluation. From the beginning, the project included systematic data collection on dietary habits, CVD risk factors and health outcomes. This data was essential not only for assessing the effectiveness of the interventions but also for adapting strategies as needed. It leveraged a flexible approach, adapting science-based interventions and rigorous evaluation to local needs, mostly based on voluntary collaboration, persuasion, training, communication, etc. Key to this approach

was the selection, in collaboration with local authorities, of local opinion leaders, such as politicians, healthcare professionals, educators and respected community members, to build ownership of the project among the population. These leaders, chosen for their influence and trust within the community, played a crucial role in promoting the project's goals and ensuring widespread acceptance of the necessary lifestyle changes. For example, politicians wanted to associate themselves with health issues that were attractive to the population, so the project often hosted local decision-makers at various occasions and gave them personal visibility. By immersing themselves in the community and leveraging personal relationships, the project team implemented effective and intensive interventions, even with a modest budget (Nissinen et al., 1986; Puska, 2009).

Extensive educational campaigns were launched, targeting both the general public and specific groups such as schoolchildren and women, who were often responsible for meal preparation, to build both an understanding of healthier foods and lifestyles as well as new culinary skills that contribute to healthy eating (Baril, 2013). These campaigns also utilised local media, including radio, television and print, to spread messages about the benefits of a healthier diet and how to achieve it. The use of relatable and local voices in these campaigns helped to build trust and acceptance among the population. This grassroots approach ensured that the dietary interventions were culturally relevant and widely accepted (Puska et al., 2011).

The project also made **significant progress in working with the food industry**, particularly the local dairy sector. Initially, there was resistance from dairy producers who feared that reducing fat consumption would harm their business. However, through persistent negotiation and collaboration, the project leaders managed to bring these producers on board. The dairy and food industry began to innovate, developing and promoting lower-fat dairy products that are now mainstream in Finland, a testament to the business opportunities that were understood thanks to the project. This was a critical development, as it allowed the population to continue consuming familiar products while reducing their intake of harmful fats and excess salt. The introduction of these products was supported by the project's education and communication campaigns, which simultaneously helped to shift public perception and demand towards healthier options (Puska & Ståhl, 2010).

Having achieved significant early successes, the project recognised the need for continued efforts to achieve lasting impacts. The work in North Karelia evolved to be seen as a national "demonstration", with lessons to be applied across Finland. The transition of the project's coordination from the University of Kuopio (currently the University of Eastern Finland) to the National Public Health Institute and later to the National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL), provided strong institutional and authoritative support under the Ministry of Health, ensuring the program's sustainability. The Finnish government also played an active role by implementing complementary policies for promoting public health based on the learnings, such as reducing salt in processed foods and increasing fruit and vegetable availability. These policies have also encouraged farmers to shift or diversify their production away from dairy with alternative sources of revenue, such as rapeseed and berries (Willingham, 2018). Simultaneously, these policies influenced the development of food environments that are more conducive to lasting change, as well as – another topic of the project – further regulating tobacco. The long-term commitment by key stakeholders allowed for profound shifts in behaviour and societal norms, with strategies eventually becoming integral to national health policies and activities (Puska, 2016; Puska et al., 2011).

3.2 Conclusions

The North Karelia Project shows that changing lifestyles and diets is challenging but possible. It exemplifies the importance of approaching topics such as dietary change as a continuous process of social change in order to achieve sustainable outcomes. Central to its success was adopting a long-term vision and maintaining close ties with both local and national politicians and decision-makers. The project made the scientific basis of its

interventions explicit through various means, helping to influence both individual behaviours and food environments. By leveraging the media and various channels for disseminating information, the project also widely communicated its messages. The involvement of influential community leaders was crucial in gaining widespread support and building ownership of the cause locally. Collaborative cross-sector efforts have been key to changing individual behaviour, business practices and policy approaches, for example by linking health and education policies around food. Involving a wide range of stakeholders across sectors to drive desired change in a coordinated manner is crucial to success. A coordinated approach enabled the project to foster a cycle of positive change in which healthier lifestyles became the norm. This underscores the need for continuous visionary leadership of coordinated action, rigorous monitoring and evaluation, but flexibility to adapt to local needs in order to influence and sustain desired behaviour changes.

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Case study #3: France

Charlie Brocard (Iddri) | February 2025

SUMMARY

Development of national food policy and food strategy

France has had a Health and Nutrition Plan since 2001, a French Food Plan (public procurement, education, waste, local, gastronomy) since 2010 and a National Pledge for Food Waste Reduction since 2013. The first is managed by the Ministry of Health while the others are administered by the Ministry of Agriculture. The plans are sectoral strategies that lack an overarching framework. Other policies, such as organic farming, are dealt with separately. The government is currently developing a National Strategy for Food, Climate and Nutrition, which will provide a vision and direction for the Health Plan and the Food Plan (both of which will remain active). Stakeholders will only be formally consulted after a first draft is published in April 2025.

Focus area 1 – Sustainability in public food procurement

Since 2018, a number of measures have been successfully implemented to increase the sustainability of public and (gradually) private food procurement: promotion of plant-based proteins, weekly vegetarian meals, reduction of plastic use and a minimum threshold for “quality” foods (incl. organic).

Focus area 2 – Social policy: greening food aid and developing alternatives

Food aid (via food banks) is the main social food policy in France, supported by the European Social Fund Plus and a 2013 law requiring supermarkets to donate unsold foods to charities. More recently, initiatives have been taken to green food aid and alternatives to the food bank system are developing, particularly at local level.

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1 Introduction

Food policy in France has historically been dominated by an agricultural lens, while since the 2000s, the nutrition and health focus gained legitimacy. Two programmes are key to the French food policy architecture and have operated independently since their inception. First, the Plan National Nutrition Santé (PNNS, French Health and Nutrition Plan) was established in 2001. The Plan sets the direction for health, nutrition and physical activity policies in France for 5-year periods. It defines France's food-based dietary guidelines and sets policies such as industrial recipe reformulation agreements, the development of the Nutri-Score or the 2004 ban on vending machines in schools.¹ Second, the Programme national de l'Alimentation (PNA, French Food Plan), launched in 2010, is the Ministry of Agriculture's plan that covers access to food, education, waste reduction, public food procurement, gastronomy and local food partnerships.² These two programmes are the main tools for translating France's food policy objectives into action at the national and local levels. According to national authorities, the PNNS will be renewed in 2026 while the situation is less clear for the PNA.

In 2019, a first attempt was made for an **integrated strategy** on food that could have merged the two plans. However, the Ministries for Agriculture and Health had competing interests that made this impossible. Thus, the 2019–2023 Programme National pour l'Alimentation et la Nutrition (PNAN, French Strategy for Food and Nutrition), which was created, was merely an additional umbrella document repeating the measures planned by the PNNS and the PNA for the same period. It had no budget and no administrative or political support, contrary to the two sectoral plans, and therefore did not strengthen integrated food policy.

In parallel, the 2019–2020 Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change took place, in which food was one of the six priority areas.³ One of the citizens' requests was to add a "climate" dimension to the existing PNNS. In response, the Assembly adopted a law in 2021 that introduced a requirement to create a new integrated strategy on food: the Stratégie nationale pour l'alimentation, la nutrition et le climat for 2030 (SNANC, National Strategy for Food, Nutrition and Climate)⁴. Rather than "greening" the health plan, the government proposed the SNANC as a new, overlapping document that would give directions to the PNNS and the PNA with limited encroachment on their political autonomy. The second aim was to promote a more holistic approach on food that could bridge sectors. To support this approach, the Ministry for the Ecological Transition was asked to co-lead the project for the first time, alongside the Ministries of Health and Agriculture. The process of drafting the strategy, which has not yet been published, consists mainly of discussions within the national administration. Parliament and local authorities have not been consulted so far, as is often the case with governmental strategies that are not translated into legislation. Stakeholder involvement was first facilitated through the Centre National de l'Alimentation (CNA, French Food Stakeholder Council), which delivered a consultative opinion in April 2023.⁵ Stakeholders will be consulted again on a draft of the strategy before adoption. Four consultative councils will also be asked to give their opinion⁶ before the Strategy is finally adopted. Overall, the stakeholder process around the SNANC so far has been insufficient due to a lack of transparency. Despite being planned for July 2023, the SNANC has not been made public yet.

1 PNNS 4 (2019–2023) is now in action: It contains close to 60 different actions, covering advertising, consumer information, industrial supply, education, public food procurement, etc. It uses a "food environment" approach for crafting policies aimed at creating favourable conditions for the adoption of healthy eating practices.

2 The third PNA (2019–2023) is currently active and contains 30 measures.

3 See the final list of propositions of the Assembly [here](#).

4 Learn more in Brocard & Saujot, 2023. The SNANC will replace the PNAN, which will not be renewed.

5 The CNA is a permanent consultative body on food matters which is composed of 64 members: unions, consumer organisations, agriculture, industry, retail, civil society and experts.

6 The CNA, the National Conference on Health, the National Council for Ecological Transition and the National Council on Poverty and Exclusion.

The French process of trying to set up an integrated food strategy leads to three conclusions: First, widening the range of actors (including ministries) involved in the development of an integrated food strategy allowed new topics and policies to emerge and created a common space for the exchange of arguments. Second, the Citizens' Assembly helped give a new dynamic towards a more integrated and ambitious food policy, which was encouraged by consultative bodies. However, the stakeholder process around the SNANC has been insufficient so far due to a lack of transparency and methodology. Third, when sectoral plans (and interests) are already in place, developing an overlapping strategy (such as the SNANC), that allows for synergies and trade-offs between sectors can be a solution. The success of such an approach would depend primarily on the legitimacy of this new strategy (based on process and political support), whether or not it has a budget, and the extent to which it is prescriptive to existing plans and policies. As the SNANC has not been made public, this remains to be seen.

This case study explores the effectiveness and enabling conditions of initiatives that have leveraged sustainability in public procurement to reduce plastic and food waste and to promote plant-based eating. Second, we look at the evolution of food poverty policy, the greening of food aid and the emergence of local alternatives to the food aid system that promote citizen participation and more transformative interventions.

2 Sustainability in public food procurement

One of the main strands of French food policy is to improve the sustainability and quality of the food offered in public food procurement (PFP) services. It is one of the main objectives of the PNA and covered by the PNNS. In France, out-of-home food consumption represents around 10 to 14% of meals consumed. New objectives were introduced from 2018, which have gradually improved the environmental sustainability of the sector.

- 2018 (Egalim Law):
 - canteens are required to elaborate and implement a plan to promote plant-based proteins from 2018
 - introduction of a mandatory objective of 50% of "quality foods"⁷ including 20% organic in public food service from 2022
 - two-year voluntary experiment (2019–2021) for one vegetarian day a week in public school canteens.⁸
- 2019: canteens are required to donate unsold meals to charities from 2020.
- 2020 (AGEC Law): sale of water bottles made of plastics in canteens is banned and objectives are set to substitute the use of plastics for cooking and food distribution by 2025.
- 2021 (Climate & Resilience Law):
 - the weekly vegetarian meal experiment is made mandatory for schools
 - local public authorities can experiment with a daily vegetarian meal
 - government, public company and university canteens are obliged to propose a daily vegetarian option from 2023
 - "quality food" objectives are extended to private food procurement starting 2025.

⁷ They are defined by the law as all products under official quality and origin signs/certifications such as protected designation of origin (PDO), protected geographical indicator (PGI), Label Rouge or "farm-made" (CNRC, 2020a).

⁸ The experiment was delicate to carry out due to potential contradictions in the legislation. For example, a 2011 decree (which has yet to be revised) still makes it mandatory that the main dish contains animal proteins (incl. eggs and dairy products) and that it should contain fish or meat at least 8 times out of 20. This still allows for a weekly vegetarian day, but not twice a week for instance, in the case of a canteen which only offers one meal option (*Centre national de la Restauration Collective* (CNRC), 2020b). The CNRC suggested in 2021 that for 2 meals out of 20, the main source of protein of the main dish would be plant-based (legumes or grains). This could appear as contradictory to the 2011 decree, but some flexibility seems to have been granted to canteens while it is being revised.

A favourable context made these changes possible: Environmental NGOs had been campaigning for vegetarian meals in schools for a few years, including through partnerships with the sector.⁹ Local NGOs had also been compiling data about the proportion of organic food served in schools and awarding pioneering municipalities.¹⁰ PFP regulations were also seen as a way to support French agriculture (including organic), which was supported by the agricultural unions. In 2017 and 2018, the context was therefore favourable for PFP regulations to be implemented.

Were those objectives met in reality? This is complex to evaluate. First, it is important to note that no sanctions are planned if obligations are not respected. Second, funding for their implementation is mostly left to the municipality level with no increase of their budget. The national government has implemented two main funds to which municipalities can apply: an annual call for Projets Alimentaires Territoriaux (PAT, Local Food Partnerships); and support for certain municipalities that also implement a canteen social pricing policy. However, the amounts are quite low: 2.84 million euros in 2024 and 50 million euros between 2019 and 2022. Third, data collection is mostly incomplete and non-representative as it is voluntary. The official platform only represents 15% of canteens. Results show that organic products amount to 13% of supply in value when other “quality foods” represent 16% – a total of 29%, far from the “50% quality food” objective (as of March 2024). Data from the Organic Agency, which is representative, estimates that only 6% of collective catering purchases are organic in 2023¹¹. Only 35% of canteens have put in place a plan to promote plant-based proteins as of 2024. In 2021, at the end of the first weekly vegetarian meal experiment, 63% of municipalities were implementing it with fairly positive conclusions (*Conseil général de l'alimentation, de l'agriculture et des espaces ruraux*, CGAAER, 2021). This rate reached 90% of municipalities in 2024 (as far as primary school canteens are concerned) (*Association des maires de France*, AMF, 2024). However, this is not the case in all institutions: New data shows that 40% of educational institutions in secondary education do not propose a weekly vegetarian option despite the law's objective (*Association végétarienne de France*, AVF, 2024).

In a nutshell, recent developments in PFP regulation have been instrumental in driving change, although funding, monitoring and support to local authorities is insufficient.

3 Social food policies: greening food aid and developing alternatives

Fighting food insecurity and poverty has been a priority of French food policies for a long time, both domestically and abroad. Although France is bound internationally to implement the “right to food” since 1980, this right is only partially completed (Action Against Hunger France, 2024). As a matter of fact, food insecurity concerns 11% of the French population (*Agence nationale de sécurité sanitaire de l'alimentation, de l'environnement et du travail*, ANSES, 2017), while up to 10% of the population depends on food banks (Ramel, 2020).

The fight against food poverty is an area of public policy that has historically been handled by the Ministry of Social Affairs, which is responsible for producing and implementing multiannual strategies aimed at preventing and reducing poverty, including food poverty. The most recent strategy is the Pacte des Solidarités 2023–2027 (Solidarity Strategy) which integrates for the first time a thematic axis targeted at building an

9 Greenpeace France; the *Fondation pour la Nature et l'Homme* in partnership with Restau'Co.

10 See for instance the *Observatoire national de la restauration collective bio et durable* (National Observatory for organic and sustainable public procurement) created in 2015.

11 This represents EUR 484 million in organic sales out of a total of EUR 7,8 billions.

inclusive ecological transition. This thematic axis contains measures on housing (energy and water expenses), clean mobility and food. Measures on food include:

- a plan for greening food aid and promoting universal access to healthy and sustainable diets – described below
- financial support for local authorities that implement the “1-euro meal” policy¹² in public catering, provided that they reach the objectives of the Climate & Resilience and Egalim laws regarding public procurement and
- the development of local and multi-stakeholder alliances against food poverty.

Food poverty is also one of the main priorities of the PNA and an objective supported by multiple government departments (Agriculture, Health, Housing, Europe and Foreign Affairs, etc.).

Food aid is the dominant policy to fight food poverty. Contrary to other sectors of public policy, food aid is an area where non-profit/charitable organisations are the main operators. They collaborate with the government, which provides funding (directly and indirectly through the EU) and policy coherence at national level. The total amount of food aid in France can be estimated at around 750 million euros a year, most of which goes to food banks. In addition, municipal structures and non-profits at the local level develop policies aimed at fighting household food insecurity, such as direct cash payments (to increase their food budget), subsidised food shops, support to pay for canteen fees or food vouchers. Funding of these actions represents on average 250 million euros each year. Yet, food banks are considered as the main instrument for tackling food poverty. They are primarily supplied through the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), an EU fund for social policy, which finances the purchase of a selection of food products for food aid (in the case of France). ESF+ funding amounts to 869 million euros for the period 2021–2027.¹³

The second supply route is the collection of unsold food from supermarkets, where waste reduction is presented as a co-benefit. In 2013, the government proposed a voluntary initiative for supermarkets to donate products to food banks. Three years later, in 2016, it went further by making this commitment mandatory by law for all supermarkets above 400 m² (the “Garot” Law). The nuance here is that supermarkets are not obliged to donate, but rather to sign an agreement with a food aid nonprofit to donate unsold products. In return, the government offers tax reductions to retailers equivalent to 60% of the value of the donated products, worth around 360 million euros annually (Le Morvan & Wanecq, 2019). After the law, a 22% increase in donations to nonprofits has been observed (Ramel, 2020), although issues pertaining to the quality of donations arose. In 2020, a law was passed requiring that the quality of the donations be monitored and controlled – but no sanctions can be imposed for non-compliance. The principles of the law were later extended to large collective catering restaurants (above 3 000 meals per day), the food industry (above a revenue of 50 million euros) and food wholesalers.¹⁴

Nonetheless, the food bank system is now questioned by a growing number of actors who feel that it has failed to provide healthy and culturally appropriate foods to those in need in a decent way (Caillavet et al., 2022). It is also underlined that food aid is part of a currently unsustainable food system with large environmental impacts (Paturel & Ramel, 2017).

One of the alternatives to donating food is to provide more financial resources to people on low incomes for buying food themselves. Cash transfers are already practiced by some municipalities, although they remain marginal. The development of a “sustainable food stamp” at national level was a key policy debate in France

12 This governmental policy aims to provide financial aid to municipalities that develop social tariffs in the canteens, including offering meals at prices as low as 1 euro for the lowest income bracket. Similarly, higher education students on scholarships were able to access 1-euro meals (instead of a price of 3.30 euros for other students) since 2020. In January 2025, the Parliament extended this 1-euro meal policy to all students.

13 The EU co-finances 90% of the fund, France the remaining 10%. More information [here](#).

14 The [2020 Law](#) for a Circular Economy and Waste Reduction.

between 2019 and 2022. It originated from a proposal by the Citizens' Assembly on Climate for a food voucher for sustainable food (as defined by the Egalim Law, see footnote 7). Several other proposals have been made by civil society organisations, ministers and parliamentarians to define the scope of the instrument (Who is eligible? Is the stamp targeted at specific foods or points of purchase? Which ones?). However, the cost of such an instrument (estimates ranged from 1,5 to 3,5 billion euros each year), the difficulty to implement it technically as well as the political risks linked to explicitly deciding which foods would be covered by the voucher (and therefore which foods would be "worthy" of state subsidies) explain why the government abandoned the idea in 2022.¹⁵ At the end of 2022, the idea re-emerged, no longer as a national policy but rather as a mechanism to develop and experiment with at the local level. To do so, a 60 million euro annual plan, Mieux Manger pour Tous (Eating Well for All), led by the Ministry of Social Affairs, has been implemented with the aim of greening the food aid system. Up to half of the funds were earmarked for local experiments, including food stamp initiatives. The Plan has now been renewed for a second year in 2023–2024 and increased to 90 million euros. It should be active until 2027. No formal evaluation of the plan is known at the time of writing.

Another alternative is one resting on the principles of food democracy according to which change in the food system for more social justice and sustainability is made possible through working on citizens' access to, participation in and capacity to act on the food system. A collective of associations has formed in 2019 to develop and disseminate the idea of a "social security for food" (Sécurité Sociale de l'Alimentation, SSA), much like the existing social security system, which acts as a public and universal health insurance.¹⁶ Similar to the origins of social security, the SSA is based on the principles of universality (of access), democracy (in managing the system) and collective financing (through social contributions). It is already tested in more than 30 sites of various sizes in France such as the Gironde region, the cities of Montpellier and Lyon, and the rural village of Dieulefit. As the concept of a "social security for food" is still new, experiments have taken different directions. Some focus on developing citizen participation through food policy councils, while others concentrate on constructing "citizen-led food funds"¹⁷. Results from the Montpellier experiment show that the SSA system: a) significantly reduces food poverty of participants, b) improves their well-being (trust, social ties, feeling of empowerment, dignity, perceived health status etc.), c) favours access to fruits and vegetables, organic and local products and d) reduces symbolic barriers to sustainable food places (Scherer et al. 2024). Such alternatives to the food aid/food bank system are receiving growing attention from the media and policymakers in France.

In conclusion, social food policy in France has undergone important changes over the past decade to promote a move away from a set of policies centred on food aid as well as to better integrate sustainability issues and a community-based approach. These developments are positive, although still marginal in the food system and lack proper evaluation.

15 You can learn more in Brocard & Saujot, 2022.

16 All citizens would be the recipients of a "food card" of around 150 euros per person that they could use to buy certain products in certain shops. Eligibility would be democratically established by local citizen committees.

17 This system of "citizen-led food funds" (in French *caisse alimentaire*) aims to create a common fund for food spending. First, citizens are grouped together, including a significant proportion of low-income or food-insecure people. They all contribute to the fund based on their capacity. Additional funding is collected from municipal or private actors. The members of the Fund then decide collectively what the money from the food fund can be spent on, which leads them to define criteria and choose specific foods or points of purchase. Finally, the money is given back to the members of the fund, generally in the form of a local alternative currency. The design and facilitation of the fund is generally handled by local associations and research actors, sometimes with operational support from municipalities.

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Case study #4: Germany

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SUMMARY

Development of national food policy and food strategy

Germany has a number of sectoral strategies and policies that contribute to different aspects of sustainable food systems, such as reducing food waste or increasing organic farming. In 2024, the German government published a Federal Food Strategy that takes an integrated approach to food policy. It provides a comprehensive set of strategic long-term goals and recognises the key role of fair food environments. However, the strategy would be more effective if supported by a concrete implementation plan and an adequately funded implementation budget.

Focus area 1 – Developing a food strategy: building momentum

This case study reflects not only on the opportunities and challenges of the Food Strategy, but also on the factors that led to its creation. These include the development of a common vision for food and agriculture by a wide range of relevant stakeholders, scientific reports as well as the increasing pressure from new alliances of stakeholders from health, social and environmental organisations in support of a more integrated food policy.

Focus area 2 – Support for alternative proteins

Government support for the alternative protein sector in Germany has increased in recent years. This includes investment in research and development projects, support programmes to provide opportunities for farmers and support structures to build networks between the relevant stakeholders.

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1 Introduction

Traditionally, national food policy in Germany was primarily shaped by agricultural policy and food safety concerns. In recent years, however, it has evolved to address a broader set of issues. Demand-side food policies have been developed as part of explicit strategies.

These include:

- the "National Reduction and Innovation Strategy for Sugar, Fats and Salt in Processed Foods", adopted by the Federal Cabinet in 2018
- the "National Strategy for Food Waste Reduction", adopted by the Federal Cabinet in 2019
- the "National Strategy for the Promotion of Breastfeeding", adopted by the Federal Cabinet in 2021
- the National Action Plan "New Opportunities for Children in Germany", taking into account children's rights to healthy food, adopted by the Federal Cabinet in 2023
- the "Organic Strategy for 2030", adopted by the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) in 2023, including measures to stimulate demand for organic products.

While the introduction of these different strategies is a positive development, there has been limited coordination between them. Furthermore, important aspects – such as the shift toward a more plant-based diet or the promotion of alternative proteins for human consumption – were not addressed in those national strategies.

Various stakeholders have therefore called for a more integrated food strategy. In 2024, the Federal Cabinet adopted a Federal Food Strategy "Good Food for Germany".

This case study reflects on the positive elements of the Food Strategy, but also on the dynamics that led to its creation. A second focus of this case study is the growing support for alternative proteins.

2 Federal Food Strategy

2.1 Building momentum for a food strategy

In November 2021, the new coalition forming the German government at the time agreed in its coalition agreement to develop a federal food strategy. After a consultation period and the formal strategy development process the formal strategy development process, under the lead of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture¹, the Federal Cabinet adopted the Federal Government's Food and Nutrition Strategy in January 2024.

Several processes contributed to the decision to develop a Federal Food Strategy:

- In 2020, the **state secretaries** responsible for sustainability in the federal ministries agreed in a **joint resolution on food policy** that a common vision for a sustainable food system in Germany was needed (Bundesregierung, 2020). The agreement was also influenced by the impressions of the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting debates on the resilience of food supply chains as well as the publication of the EU Commission's Farm-to-Fork Strategy.
- In the same year, the **Scientific Advisory Board on Agricultural Policy and Food** (WBAE) at the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture published a comprehensive report recommending the development of an integrated food policy and the creation of a fair food environment (WBAE, 2020). The report provided an in-depth analysis of relevant policy instruments, specific recommendations and cost calculations and became a widely cited contribution to the food policy debate in Germany.
- Following the 2020 farmers' protests in Germany, the **"Commission on the Future of Agriculture"** (ZKL) was set up by former chancellor Angela Merkel to develop a common vision for the future of agriculture. Under the moderation of Prof. Peter Strohschneider, the ZKL² developed a consensus vision among a diverse group of stakeholders – including the Farmers Union and major environmental NGOs – who had previously held strongly conflicting views on the direction of agricultural policy. The consensus was published in a joint roadmap in 2021 (ZKL, 2021) and includes recommendations on food policy to contribute to healthy and sustainable diets.
- In June 2021, the Ministry of Food and Agriculture organised a series of national dialogues on the future of food systems in preparation for the **UN Food System Summit** (UNFSS), which took place in September 2021. For the first time in an official process, the need for plant-rich diets as part of future food systems was selected by the Ministry of Food and Agriculture as one of five key topics.³
- In 2021, a **broad coalition of health, social and environmental organisations** as well as agricultural stakeholders and food policy councils called for the development of a food strategy (Bündnis #ErnährungswendeAnpacken, 2021).

In summary, the German example shows that:

- Inter-ministerial cooperation has helped to establish food policy as a cross-cutting policy area.
- Scientific reports and advisory bodies have played an important role in providing science-based recommendations to shape food policy in the medium and long term.

1 Other ministries were also involved in the development process. This eventually led to a compromise and agreement adopted by the Federal Cabinet.

2 A key success factor was the design of the process and the facilitation of Prof. Strohschneider, which later led to his appointment as the chair of the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture launched by EU Commission President von der Leyen in January 2024.

3 See Wunder and Jägle (2022) for a summary of the conclusions of the events and debates.

- Taking the conflicting perspectives of relevant stakeholders seriously and supporting a constructive exchange has contributed to compromises and even to a consensus on the future of agriculture and food in Germany.
- International policies and processes have supported the national debate.
- New alliances and coalitions of actors from health, social and environmental organisations have helped to put food on the political agenda.

Food policy also moved up the political agenda with the establishment of the **Citizens' Assembly on Nutrition in Transition** of the German Parliament. In parallel with the development of the food strategy, although not directly linked to its process, the *Bundestag* in 2023 mandated a citizens' assembly to discuss the role of the state in shaping food consumption. The result was a set of nine⁴ recommendations to policy makers, published in 2024.⁵ Given the relatively high level of ambition of the recommendations, this process added weight and credibility to the Food Strategy by demonstrating that citizens saw an important role for government in shaping food policy.

2.2 Scope and focus of the Food Strategy

Following a process that allowed for stakeholder participation through online workshops and the opportunity to provide written input, the food strategy was drafted and coordinated between the federal ministries in 2023 and adopted by the Federal Cabinet in January 2024.

The Federal Food Strategy "Good Food for Germany" (BMEL, 2024c) sets out an ambitious framework of strategic objectives⁶ and serves as a comprehensive basis for future food policy. It provides an overview of existing and planned measures, strategies and responsibilities in various policy areas relevant to food and nutrition. For the first time, even previously controversial objectives – such as strengthening plant-rich diets or recognising the importance of food environments – were included.

The Food Strategy also sets out the goal of integrating dietary guidelines, developed by the German Nutrition Society (DGE), into public food procurement. This is particularly relevant as the DGE's dietary guidelines have been reformed in 2024 to take into account not only nutritional requirements but also environmental effects (Schäfer et al., 2024).⁷

The Food Strategy also recognises the need for socially equitable access to healthy and sustainable diets and outlines planned activities and ambitions to improve food policy, including new areas of research.

4 In February 2024, the 160 participants in the Citizens' Council "Nutrition in Transition: Between Private Concerns and Public Responsibilities" presented their nine recommendations to the German Bundestag (Bürgerrat Ernährung des Deutschen Bundestages, 2024). The three priority recommendations were: 1) Free and healthy lunches for all children in kindergartens and schools, 2) Introduction of a mandatory government label for climate, animal welfare and health, 3) Reduction of food waste through mandatory requirements for retailers to donate edible food.

5 As a result, many of the recommended instruments have been discussed more intensively by policymakers in parliamentary committees, although as of April 2025, no implementation steps have yet been taken.

6 The six strategic areas according to the [official translation of the strategy](#) are "a) Balanced diets and sufficient exercise – promoting adequate nutrient and energy intakes and exercise; b) More vegetables, fruit and legumes – promoting plant-based diets; c) Growing up healthy and growing old healthy – ensuring socially equitable access to healthy and sustainable nutrition; d) Well-balanced diets in daycare, school and canteen meals – improving mass catering; e) Good food for us and our planet – increasing the supply of sustainably and organically produced food; f) Valuing food – reducing food waste".

7 For the first time, the DGE methodology used to develop food based dietary guidelines integrated not only nutritional requirements but also the reduction of environmental impacts (Schäfer et al., 2024). This approach might be an inspiration for other countries as it recognises, that a) health depends not only on nutritious food but also on intact ecosystems and b) a healthy diet is very much in line with a diet that reduces environmental impacts. The guidelines recommend significantly reduced consumption of animal products. For example, the recommended maximum meat intake for healthy adults is 300 grams per week.

2.3 Reflecting on implementation and potential impact

2.3.1 Challenges

Despite its many positive elements, the strategy lacks some critical aspects. For example:

- Fiscal instruments – such as a sugar tax, VAT reform or instruments to reduce food poverty are not included.
- The strategy lacks both a financing plan and a concrete implementation roadmap. It neither defines time-bound targets, nor clear indicators and responsibilities. This is problematic given that the Food Strategy is intended to guide actions through to 2050.
- Finally, the strategy explicitly focuses on food policy on the federal level, but it lacks new proposals⁸ for enhancing cooperation with the *Länder* and local authorities. This is a significant omission, as many measures – such as improvements to communal catering and the ambition to make German nutrition guidelines mandatory in public procurement by 2030 (a stated goal of the strategy) – fall within their jurisdiction. Closer collaboration between the federal and regional levels would be beneficial, as an increasing number of federal states and some regions and municipalities have developed their own food strategies and action plans.

2.3.2 Opportunities and outlook

The Food Strategy includes guidelines on its governance and implementation process. In particular, the establishment of the following three new bodies holds potential:

- an inter-ministerial Working Group on Sustainable and Health-promoting Nutrition, to improve collaboration between food-related activities in eight ministries: Food and Agriculture; Environment and Consumer Protection; Health; Economy and Climate; Research and Education; Families; Labour and Social Affairs and Finance. To date, there are few formal or informal fora for coordinating activities. An inter-ministerial working group has the potential to significantly improve the situation.
- a main office for the Food Strategy to centrally manage and monitor progress located within the Ministry of Food and Agriculture.
- a so called "Accompanying Forum" that (by 2025) brings together stakeholders from policy, science, administration and interest groups to reflect on the implementation and further development of the Food Strategy.

One year after the adoption of the Food Strategy, the Ministry of Food and Agriculture published an [online overview](#) outlining the status of its 90 short-, medium- and long-term measures. As of April 2025, 8 measures have been marked as "completed", 55 are "under implementation", 9 are "in planning" and 18 are classified as "permanent measures". To assess the Strategy's impact, indicators to monitor its effectiveness are currently being developed.

In summary, the Federal Food Strategy provides a comprehensive set of strategic long-term goals, but lacks some important instruments, an adequate budget and an implementation plan. Increased collaboration between federal ministries, the *Länder* and municipalities will be important for successful implementation.

⁸ Some structures are already in place, such as the so called "Vernetzungsstellen" (Networking Centres). Since 2008, the federal government cofinances institutions within the *Länder* to support schools, daycare centers, and public institutions in implementing healthy and sustainable catering systems.

3 Support for alternative proteins

Political support for the alternative proteins sector has increased in recent years. Support programmes and policy strategies have been developed as shown in the overview below.

3.1 Overview of key support measures

Support for alternative proteins has long focused on plant-based alternatives, particularly protein crops. Since 2012, Germany has a **Protein Crop Strategy**, which promotes the cultivation and use of legumes. Building on this strategy, the Ministry of Food and Agriculture is currently developing a more comprehensive **protein strategy**, expected to be published in 2025. While the existing strategy has primarily focused on the production of protein crops for animal feed, the new strategy will increase the scope of the existing strategy and place greater emphasis on the promotion of protein crops and alternative proteins for human consumption. The scope of the strategy now goes beyond plant proteins and aims “to address all types of alternative protein sources for which market prospects are expected and which could thus open up alternative or additional sources of income for the agricultural and food industry” (BMEL, 2025: 2), although it does not yet specify which other alternatives will be covered with this.

The alternative protein market received further support in 2024 through additional funding agreed by the German *Bundestag* (Deutscher Bundestag, 2024). Most importantly this led to the set up of the so-called **Opportunities for Farms Programme** (*Chancenprogramm Höfe*), introduced in October 2024, supports farms that want to switch from livestock farming to the production and processing of alternative proteins for human consumption, for example through demonstration projects and knowledge transfer in the field of production and processing methods for alternative proteins (BMEL, 2024a).

Also in 2024, the **Proteins of the Future Competence Centre** was established. It implements programmes, such as the Opportunities for Farms Programme, coordinates the implementation of the protein strategy and supports the networking of stakeholders along the value chain, for example through stakeholder forums as well as information and communication measures. The work of the Competence Centre focuses on promoting the cultivation and use of legumes, nuts, algae and fungi (BLE, 2024; BMEL, 2025; BZfE, 2025).

The Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture acknowledged the relevance of alternative proteins through establishing a new unit called “Proteins of the Future” in 2025. In addition, **research projects** for alternative proteins, **demonstration networks**, funding for **innovation partnerships** and other measures have been introduced to strengthen the agricultural start-up ecosystem in Germany (BMEL, 2025).

According to a recent calculation by the German Ministry of Food and Agriculture, the total amount of public funding for the production and processing of alternative proteins for the past legislative period (October 2021 to March 2025) was around 79 million euros. The Federal Ministry of Education is funding alternative protein research projects with an additional 4.25 million euros. The Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action supports companies and research projects in the sector through funding programmes, e.g. in the areas of bio-economy and innovation funding, with 28 million euros (BMEL, 2025).

While it is not yet clear how the new government will continue the work on alternative proteins, the coalition agreement includes a sentence outlining further support: “We are committed to a comprehensive and ambitious EU protein strategy and are strengthening the domestic cultivation of protein crops in order to reduce imports.

We will promote the development and market launch of sustainable alternative proteins." (CDU, CSU and SPD, 2025: 43).

3.2 Supporting factors for the development of alternative proteins in Germany

The increased support for alternative proteins took place against the background of a growing support of the private sector. For example,

- the Federal Association for Alternative Protein Sources (BALPro) was founded in 2019. BALPro represents the interests of more than 135 members, including start-ups, established companies, venture capital firms and research institutions. It aims to create an independent platform for dialogue between society, business and political decisionmakers to support innovators and multipliers in advancing the promotion and development of alternative proteins,⁹
- various established German meat and dairy companies are diversifying their product portfolio to include alternative proteins, contributing to the availability and affordability of plant-based alternatives.
- two major German retailers – Lidl in 2023, followed by Rewe in 2025 – have prepared protein strategies and implemented measures to increase their plant-based product portfolios.

3.3 Development of alternative protein markets

How exactly political support for alternative proteins has influenced the development of the alternative protein market is not yet evaluated. There are no studies analysing the correlation between policy measures and market uptake and it is difficult to disentangle the effects of private sector action, evolving societal eating norms, economic factors, such as rising food prices driven by inflation, and political support mechanisms. Furthermore, many of the supporting initiatives are still in their early stages, so some of their impacts may only become evident over time.

However, Germany is the largest market for plant-based alternatives in Europe, with a total value of 1.91 billion euros (GFI, 2023).

An analysis of GfK data¹⁰ by the Thünen Institute shows that the demand for both meat and dairy alternatives almost tripled between 2017 and 2021. While meat alternatives accounted for 22 000 tonnes in 2017, their demand rose to 62 000 tonnes by 2021. For dairy alternatives, demand rose from 140 000 tonnes to 362 000 tonnes over the same period (Christoph-Schulz et al., 2025).

3.4 Changes in food consumption patterns

Meat consumption in Germany has declined over the past years. Data from market analyses shows a decline from 61 kg per capita in 2018 to a stagnant level of around 53 kg in 2022, 2023 and 2024 (BLE, 2025), representing a 13% decrease.

⁹ See BALPro website [balpro.de](https://www.balpro.de).

¹⁰ This panel contains data from 13 000 households by the market research institute GfK and in this case looks at the demand for meat and dairy products and their plant-based alternatives for the period 2017-2021.

Surveys analysing the actual food intake and dietary habits in the German population, have not been updated in 20 years¹¹ and did not yet assess the role of new alternatives to animal products. Instead, they only report consumption levels of product categories such as meat, dairy, fruit and vegetables. However, Bavaria recently published an update of its nutrition survey after 20 years (KErn, 2025). It showed that people in Bavaria eat around 30% less meat and sausage than they did 20 years ago and about 18% more fruit and vegetables.¹²

However, there is no assessment about the single role of alternative products in the reduction of livestock products and the reasons for changes in consumption patterns may be manifold as described above.

Studies analysing reasons for dietary change in Germany have come up with different explanations. Seffen and Dohle (2023) suggest that Germans are reducing their meat consumption mainly due to health benefits, social influences and the increased availability of meat alternatives. The results of a survey analysed by Northrope et al. (2024) show that health benefits tend to be a stronger motivator than environmental or animal welfare concerns. However, a survey by OpinionWay in 2022 found that respondents most often cited animal welfare and climate and environmental protection as motivations for reducing the consumption of animal products (GFI, 2022). The Food Report of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture states that since 2020, curiosity has been the most frequently cited reason for purchasing vegetarian or vegan alternatives (BMEL, 2024b). The studies show that the increased availability of alternatives – which has been and continues to be the subject of many of the public support measures – is one of the factors contributing to the increase in their consumption.

11 The last National Nutrition Survey (NVS II), which surveyed around 20 000 people in Germany, was conducted between November 2005 and January 2007 and is therefore outdated.

12 Fruit and vegetable consumption (average 270 g per person per day) is still below the recommended value of 550 g per day (KErn, 2025). Consumption of meat and sausages (average 650 g per week) is above the maximum recommended by the current dietary guidelines (Schäfer et al., 2024), which do not recommend more than 300 g of meat and sausages per week.

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Case study #5: Netherlands

Hilke Bos-Brouwers and Sanne Stroosnijder, Wageningen University & Research | February 2025

SUMMARY

Development of national food policy and food strategy

The Netherlands started early to address sustainable food production and consumption through strategic documents and policies. In 2009, the Netherlands published “Sustainable Food”, a strategic document outlining its vision for sustainable food for the next 15 years. Thematic priorities included reducing land and resource use, minimising emissions, improving animal welfare and reducing food waste. Building on this foundation, the 2015 Food Agenda for Safe, Healthy and Sustainable Food broadened the government’s focus. Developed through inter-ministerial collaboration, it emphasised the interdependence of health, sustainability and food security. The policy documents have mainly been used to define priority issues within existing funding schemes, e.g. for research policy. Food policy in the Netherlands primarily follows a collaborative approach between the public and private sectors, with partnerships with businesses and civil society organisations becoming central to policy implementation.

Focus area 1 – Food loss and waste reduction

Reducing food waste has been a central priority in Dutch food policy. The Dutch government has pursued a multi-pronged strategy to address food waste, achieving a 23% reduction in household food waste between 2015 and 2023. A key element of this approach is the public–private partnership Stichting Samen Tegen Voedselverspilling (Foundation Food Waste Free United), established in 2018. This initiative has grown into a broad network of stakeholders across the entire supply chain and supports the implementation of food waste reduction solutions at all levels of the supply chain.

Focus area 2 – Alternative proteins

The Netherlands has positioned itself as a leader in the development of alternative proteins within Europe. This has been achieved through a nationwide protein strategy, investments in research and innovation, as well as regulatory frameworks to support commercialisation.

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1 Introduction

The Netherlands has demonstrated a sustained commitment to creating a sustainable food system, with its efforts formally beginning in 2009 through the publication of *Duurzaam Voedsel (Sustainable Food)*, a policy document issued by the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (Ministerie van Landbouw, Visserij, Voedselzekerheid en Natuur, LNV). This document outlined an ambitious vision for the Netherlands to become a global leader in sustainable food production within 15 years. It identified critical priorities such as reducing land and resource use, minimising emissions, improving animal welfare, and decreasing food waste. The strategy adopted a comprehensive systems perspective, addressing interconnected challenges rather than focusing on isolated issues – thus embedding sustainability as a core tenet of Dutch food policy.

This policy was developed at a time of increasing global awareness of sustainability issues, particularly the environmental impact of food production and consumption. The 2007–2008 global food crisis, marked by price volatility and supply chain disruptions (Headey, 2013), underscored the importance of creating resilient and sustainable food systems. In response, the Dutch government framed sustainability as a guiding principle for its agricultural and food policies, aiming to mitigate such vulnerabilities while positioning the Netherlands as a leader in sustainable practices.

Building on this foundation, the 2015 *Voedselagenda voor veilig, gezond en duurzaam voedsel* (Food Agenda for Safe, Healthy and Sustainable Food, Ministry of Economic Affairs, MINEZ, 2015) expanded the government's focus. Developed through inter-ministerial collaboration, it emphasised the interdependence of health, sustainability and food security. Recognising the complexity of food systems, the agenda called for coordinated actions among policymakers, researchers and industry stakeholders. It also stressed the importance of monitoring progress and incorporating evaluations to create an adaptive and iterative policy framework.

From 2016 onward, policy developments further highlighted the urgency of ecological sustainability, the need for robust food systems, and the role of the Netherlands as a major food exporter to world markets. These updates reinforced the Netherlands' role in addressing global issues such as hunger and malnutrition and emphasised the necessity of fostering collaboration across the public and private sectors. Partnerships with businesses and civil society organisations became central to policy implementation, helping to create an inclusive environment where diverse stakeholders could contribute to shared objectives.

In 2017, these efforts culminated in the *Voedseltop (Food Summit)*, which convened policymakers, industry leaders and civil society actors to align ambitions and strategies for sustainable food systems. The summit also marked a significant financial commitment, with 20 million euros allocated to sustainability-related food initiatives. At the same time, the Ministry of Agriculture published *Waardevol en Verbonden (Valuable and Connected)*, a vision document that introduced circular agriculture as a cornerstone of Dutch food policy. This concept prioritised resource optimisation and the reduction of environmental impact within ecological boundaries.

The integration of food systems into climate policy became more explicit in the 2019 Dutch Climate Agreement (Rijksoverheid). While food is not treated as a separate sector in the agreement, it is incorporated within the Agriculture and Land Use section. Key food-related commitments include reducing food waste to cut CO₂ emissions, encouraging plant-based diets as part of the protein transition, and promoting sustainable agricultural practices to lower the environmental footprint of food production. These measures signalled a growing alignment between food policy and climate objectives, emphasising the interconnectedness of environmental, social, and economic goals.

Following the evaluation of the *Voedselagenda* between 2016 and 2020 (LNV, 2022), the government made several adjustments to enhance policy effectiveness. Efforts to reduce food waste were intensified and, within the National Protein Strategy, greater emphasis was placed on expanding plant-based protein consumption. The government also reinforced its commitment to circular agriculture by investing in research and innovation, as well as integrating sustainability into broader environmental policies. In the 2024 *Kamerbrief Duurzaam Voedselbeleid (Parliamentary Letter on Sustainable Food Policy)* (LNV), the minister responsible for agriculture and food at the time summarised the ongoing food policy initiatives and concluded that a more detailed elaboration of an integrated healthy and sustainable food policy – by the Ministries of Health and Agriculture, with corresponding policy choices and financing – would be for a subsequent cabinet to shape.

A defining feature of Dutch (food) policymaking has been its inclusiveness and reliance on *polderen* – a consensus-based governance model and term for multi-actor collaboration rooted in the Netherlands' historical practice of managing shared resources. This approach has enabled broad consultation with stakeholders, including farmers, industry representatives, consumer groups, and environmental organisations.

In this case study, we provide an overview of two cornerstones of Dutch food policy – food waste reduction and protein diversification – highlighting key success factors as well as their integration with climate policy.

2 Food loss and waste reduction

Reducing food waste has been a central priority in Dutch food policy, driven by the recognition of its environmental, economic, and social impacts. In 2015, as part of the *Voedselagenda* mentioned above, the Dutch government adopted a multi-pronged strategy to halve food waste by 2030. This strategy reflects a systems-based approach that addresses food waste at all levels of the supply chain, from production to consumption.

The implementation of this strategy gained serious traction in 2017, when a national task force was initiated by the Dutch government, Wageningen University & Research (WUR), the Netherlands Nutrition Centre (NNC), and 25 private frontrunning businesses. Companies across the supply chain, government, civil society organisations, and knowledge institutes collaborated to formulate a joint national agenda to reduce food waste (TCEF, 2018). The concrete goal is to keep an additional one million tonnes of food in the food chain every year. The design and implementation of this Voluntary Agreement (VA) was piloted within the EU REFRESH project, alongside four other countries. The learnings from the establishment of the VA were included in a blueprint report (REFRESH, 2019).

Building on the success of this pilot phase, the Stichting Samen Tegen Voedselverspilling (STV, or: Foundation Food Waste Free United, FWFU) was formally established as a public-private partnership in 2018. Since then, it has managed the national ecosystem that brings together key initiatives, expertise, and drivers of food waste reduction in the Netherlands. It has grown into a robust network with over 125 stakeholders, including farmers, food producers, feed processors, retail and food service organisations, knowledge institutions, local and national governments, and non-governmental organisations (STV, 2024). Solution providers and sector associations also participate in the partnership. The Foundation has been recognised as a public benefit organisation, underscoring its societal importance.

Within STV/FWFU, the Dutch national strategy for food waste prevention consists of four key pillars:

1. **Monitoring progress and impact:** On behalf of Food Waste Free United (FWFU) and funded by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Security and Nature (LNVN), WUR measures the effects of individual actions taken by stakeholders and the overall impacts at sector level. In 2024, data were collected for retail, company and event catering, the bread and bakery sector, potato processors, the meat and meat products sector, fish processors, confectionery businesses, and fruit and vegetable traders. For example, the annual retail benchmark was first published in 2018; since then, Dutch supermarkets have reduced their food waste by 17.4% (WUR, 2024).
2. **Joining forces to combat food waste across the food supply chain:** Stakeholders and leaders have been combining their strengths, networks, and knowledge to develop and scale innovative solutions. For example, since 2018, multiple working groups (clusters) have been set up with a targeted approach (sector-, product category- or challenge-specific), including circular animal proteins, bakery and bread waste, and a date labelling coalition (STV/FWFU, 2024).
3. **Consumers:** On behalf of FWFU and funded by the Ministry of LNVN, the Netherlands Nutrition Centre aims to bring about sustainable change in consumer behaviour through campaigns and other actions, including the Food Waste Free Week. Between 2019 and 2023, this annual action week saw a steady increase in partners – from an initial 68 to over 160 – as well as greater media attention and campaign reach. Research in 2023 showed that 50% of people in the Netherlands (6.8 million individuals) had heard about preventing food waste during that week (NCC, 2024).
4. **Changing the rules:** Food Waste Free United stimulates and advocates for the reform of legislation, policies, and instruments that facilitate circular and zero-waste practices (WFBR, 2020). For instance, existing laws around food safety and expiration dates often hinder the redistribution of surplus food. By engaging with policymakers at national and EU levels, the foundation seeks to harmonise regulations and incentivise waste reduction efforts. Proposed reforms include simplifying date labelling to distinguish between “use-by” and “best-before” dates and creating tax incentives for businesses that donate surplus food.

The implementation of the food waste strategy relies on a collaborative model that integrates public and private efforts. Government funding supports research, infrastructure development, and pilot projects, while businesses contribute their expertise and resources to operationalise solutions. Knowledge institutions, such as Wageningen University & Research, play a crucial role in developing evidence-based interventions and monitoring their effectiveness.

The activities of FWFU to coordinate the ecosystem and implement the actions are financed on a 50/50 basis by public and private partners. The Ministry of LNVN provided funding of €300,000 annually between 2018 and 2022 to coordinate the VA. Since 2023, the annual budget has been increased to €500,000. Additionally, a budget of €150,000–€200,000 per year is available to support measurement and voluntary reporting by food business operators. The national consumer behaviour campaign is financed by the ministry with a budget of €1.0–€1.8 million annually (DG SANTE, 2024).

The Netherlands has achieved measurable success in food waste reduction. By 2022, household food waste had declined by 23% compared to 2015 levels (Van Lieshout & Knappe, 2024). Across the full supply chain, average food savings ranged between 10.5% and 23.7% (Soethoudt & Vollebregt, 2024). However, according to the policy review *Acceleration Agenda for Reducing Food Waste* (Bos-Brouwers, 2023), the current pace of reduction remains insufficient to meet the target of halving food waste by 2030. The report also provided recommendations and called for the adoption of more stringent measures, including mandatory waste reduction targets for businesses and stronger incentives for surplus food redistribution. It further emphasised the need for sustained public engagement to maintain momentum in changing consumer habits.

3 Support of alternative proteins

The protein transition agenda, which seeks to shift diets from animal-based to plant-based proteins, is another cornerstone of Dutch food policy. This transition aims to minimise the environmental impacts of food production and improve public health. The National Protein Strategy, published by the Ministry of LNV in 2020, outlined measures to reduce dependence on animal proteins by promoting alternatives such as legumes, insects, and cultured meat. Its goal of achieving a 50% share for plant-based proteins in the average Dutch diet by 2030 aligns with broader sustainability objectives. These efforts position the Netherlands at the forefront of alternative protein development in Europe.

As a result, the alternative protein market grew by 50% between 2018 and 2020, driven by government support, consumer demand, and research advancements (ProVeg International, 2024).

Collaboration has been central to advancing the protein transition. Initiatives such as the Green Protein Alliance, established in 2017, bring together private companies, NGOs, and research institutions to foster innovation, share best practices, and promote plant-based protein consumption. Investments in research and development have focused on improving the quality and marketability of alternative proteins, while regulatory frameworks have facilitated commercialisation. For example, in 2022, the Dutch government allocated €60 million to support an ecosystem for cellular agriculture to produce animal products directly from animal and microbial cells. At the time, this represented the world's largest financial commitment to cellular agriculture by a national government. In 2024, the Ministry of LNV co-funded a Citizens' Panel on Sustainable Protein Consumption, which involved 80 participants from across the country. In January 2025, the government announced investments in two new cellular agriculture scale-up facilities.

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Case study #6: Poland

Adrianna Wrona (Green Economy Institute) | November 2024

SUMMARY

Development of national food policy and food strategy

Poland does not have a cross-sectoral food strategy at national level. Food policy is mainly considered through the lens of agricultural and health policy. In 2021, the Ministry of Health published a National Health Plan 2021-2025 in which the prevention of overweight and obesity is one of the main objectives. Poland also has several social policies aimed at tackling food poverty.

Focus area 1 – Health policy interventions

Examples include the ban on selling junk food at schools, introduced in 2015, which restricts the availability of foods high in sugar, sweeteners, fats and salt to minors. It also includes a reflection of the sugar tax which was introduced in 2021.

Focus area 2 – Social policy to combat food poverty

Examples include the *Meal at School and Home* programme and the so-called milk bars. *Meal at School and Home* supports low-income households by providing financial assistance, food products and meal delivery. Milk bars are commercial restaurants offering budget meals, supported by a 70% government subsidy on the purchase of some raw materials.

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1 Introduction

Historically, Polish food policy has been defined by the topics of agriculture and food security. Aspects related to food production are primarily addressed through financial support within the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and a few national programmes (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 2024; Agency for the Restructuring and Modernisation of Agriculture, 2024). Additionally, several forms of food safety controls are carried out by national institutions.¹ Despite the narrow focus, the multi-institutional set-up causes numerous efficiency problems related to limited cooperation between agencies, lack of transparency, overlapping competencies and inconsistent regulations. Consequently, the Polish National Audit Agency (2021) assessed the national food safety environment as ineffective, requiring a significant transformation of administrative structures and the establishment of food and nutrition education policies in society.

Moreover, Poland still lacks an (integrated) national food policy: Polish food policy is fragmented, addressed by multiple uncoordinated ministries and treated as a side aspect to other policy sectors and objectives rather than a subject with its own objectives. Most actions in this area directly implement EU regulations or standards.

This case study explores the lessons learned from the Polish government's efforts to support healthier dietary choices, underscoring the importance of a holistic and coordinated approach to demand-side interventions. Examples include the implementation of a sugar tax and a ban on selling junk food at school. We also explore social policy for combating food poverty, including the Meal at School and Home programme, the Operational Food Assistance Programme and the so-called milk bars, a former cornerstone of Polish social policy that continues to serve this purpose and is also an important and underutilised lever for integrating health objectives into the social agenda.

2 Health policy interventions: obesity prevention

2.1 National Health Plan 2021–2025

When it comes to policies more directly dealing with food consumption, the area that has received the most attention, albeit still insufficiently, is health. The National Health Plan 2021–2025 names the prevention of overweight and obesity as one of the main goals of the programme (Ministry of Health, 2021). The key initiatives include running a nationwide nutrition education platform – the National Centre for Nutrition Education – which provides the public with information and tools (such as an online database comprising relevant articles and materials) aimed at supporting healthy eating habits and physical activity. It develops and publishes National Dietary Guidelines as well as dietary recommendations for specific health conditions. The Centre also offers free online dietary and psycho-dietary consultations, as well as various educational activities such as cooking workshops for children and training for professionals involved in combating overweight and obesity.

Additionally, the National Health Plan supports research activities related to monitoring consumer dietary preferences and choices (mostly focused on examining consumption of sweet products and their nutritional

1 Such as the State Sanitary Inspection (*Państwowa Inspekcja Sanitarna*), the Veterinary Inspection (*Inspekcja Weterynaryjna*), the Inspection of Commercial Quality of Agricultural and Food Products (*Inspekcja jakości Handlowej Artykułów Rolno-Spożywczych*) or, in the more limited form, the Environmental Protection Inspection (*Inspekcja Ochrony Środowiska*).

values), obesity prevention amongst children aged 7 to 9, food labelling regulations including front-of-pack nutrition labelling, as well as an update of nutritional standards for the Polish population (Ministry of Health, 2021).

2.2 Implementation of a sugar tax

In 2021 the Polish government introduced a sugar tax² aimed at promoting healthier consumer choices by discouraging the consumption of sugary beverages. The primary goal was to reduce the intake of added sugars and encourage both manufacturers to reformulate their products and consumers to opt for healthier alternatives. The sugar tax is still in place today, while potential changes to the regulation were recently discussed (Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland, 2024).

According to the analysis performed by the Polish agency *Centrum Monitorowania Rynku* (2021) following the implementation of the tax, the price of carbonated sugary drinks increased by around 36% between January 2021 and August 2021, leading to a 20% drop in sales. Its impact on dietary habits remains to be evaluated, including as part of the National Health Plan research on consumers' dietary choices. Such a study should deliver a more robust assessment of the policy outcomes, especially as experts suggest that the drop in sales recorded in 2021 could have also been attributed to the Covid-19 pandemic (Przygoda, 2021). On the other hand, the tax has indeed prompted many manufacturers to reduce the sugar content or introduce smaller packaging. Despite mixed reactions and some unintended consequences, such as the substitution of sugar with fruit juice to lower the tax burden, the tax generated significant revenue, most of which (96.5%) was transferred to the National Health Fund (Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland, 2015). The exact methodology of allocating the funds remains unclear. Although the Public Health Act (2021) states that the money should be spent on both preventing and curing obesity and diabetes, most of it is spent on curing diabetes (Kurier MP, 2022). At the same time, experts maintain that it is obesity prevention measures that should be supported by the sugar tax revenues in the first place (PAP MediaRoom, 2024).

2.3 The ban on selling junk food in Polish schools and kindergartens

One policy that has been a good first step in the fight against obesity amongst children and adolescents is the ban on the sale of junk food in schools and kindergartens.

In August 2015, the Polish Minister of Health issued a regulation concerning groups of food products intended for sale to children and adolescents in educational institutions and the requirements that food products used in mass catering for children and adolescents must meet. The policy was introduced in response to the growing problem of obesity among children. The aim of the regulation was to improve nutrition for children and adolescents in schools and promote healthy eating habits by limiting foods high in sugars, sweeteners, fats and salt/sodium. It addressed two main areas: the range of products available in school shops,³ and how to incorporate various food groups in the menus of public school canteens. It stipulated that in schools (excluding adult education institutions, preschools and other forms of early childhood education), it is prohibited to sell unhealthy food, such as chips or fast food. It also is forbidden to serve or advertise so-called junk food in these institutions. Non-compliance with the ban can result in fines ranging from 1 000 to 5 000 Polish złoty (235–1 200 euros). The head of the institution has the authority to terminate contracts with catering companies or the owners of school shops.

² Contained in the current version of the Public Health Act of 11 September 2015 (Journal of Laws of 2021, Item 183, as amended).

³ In Poland, it is not uncommon to find food shops in schools.

The categories of food products that can be sold to children and youth were specified by the Minister of Health in a regulation in 2015. The executive regulation also outlines the requirements for food served in school cafeterias, for example. The changes included increasing the consumption of vegetables, fruits and fish, decreasing the consumption of fried foods and requiring meals to be made from natural ingredients, excluding artificial concentrates. Moreover, it provided detailed guidelines regarding package sizing, portion sizes and product quality. This means that in many cases school shops and food producers had to implement new solutions and seek new suppliers (Romaniuk et al., 2021).

An inspection conducted by the National Audit Agency two years after the regulation came into force concluded that around 30% of school shops inspected had not met the regulatory requirements while 21.4% of parents felt there was insufficient healthy food available in school shops (National Audit Agency, 2017). Implementation issues and the availability of healthier food therefore need to be improved to increase the effectiveness of the ban.

2.4 Concluding remarks on health policy interventions

Despite the existence of interventions aimed at mitigating the health impacts of diet, Polish food policy still inadequately addresses diet-related diseases and lacks appropriate mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating behavioural changes. The programmes and regulations described above are limited in scope and do not shape the overall food environment and behaviours among the Polish population. This results in a growing prevalence of unhealthy eating habits, such as high consumption of processed foods, inadequate intake of fruits and vegetables, as well as high meat and sugar consumption, leading not only to the development of diabetes in the population, but also cardio-vascular disease and mental health conditions, among others (*Interdyscyplinarne Centrum Analiz i Współpracy*, 2023).

3 Social policy for combating food poverty

Besides health-related food policies, there are several instruments aimed at tackling food poverty in Poland, which are elements of social policy determined by the 2004 Social Assistance Act (Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland, 2004). These are implemented through national programmes and non-governmental organisations. Two key programmes financed and implemented at national level are *Meal at School and Home* and the Operational Food Assistance Programme, co-financed by EU funds (Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived). Another part of food related social assistance are milk bars, government-subsidised yet commercial restaurants that will be further described below.

3.1 Meal at School and Home programme

The *Meal at School and Home* programme for 2024–2028 is funded from the national budget and provides year-round support to children from low-income families and vulnerable adults, such as the elderly and disabled, through financial assistance for meals, food products and meal delivery (Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland, 2023). A key element of the Programme is to give school-age children and young people access to a hot meal prepared in the school cafeteria. This is believed to provide greater control over the quality of the products used to prepare the meal and the meal preparation process itself. For this reason, the Programme also offers support for public primary schools in organising canteens and dining areas. The Programme is structured into three modules, respectively focusing on children (module 1), adults (module 2) and the

organisation of school dining facilities (module 3). A total of 2.75 billion Polish złoty (~640 million euros) from the state budget has been allocated for the implementation of the Programme for the years 2024 to 2028 (Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland, 2023).

The programme for 2024–2028 is the continuation of the *Meal at School and Home* 2019–2023 programme. The audit of the latter, performed by the Polish National Audit Agency (2022), revealed that in 2019 and 2020 support provided within modules 1 and 2 reached over one million people a year and, overall, the programme was effectively run, coordinated and monitored. The assessment of the implementation and monitoring of module 3 of the Programme was much less favourable (National Audit Agency, 2022).

3.2 Operational Food Assistance Programme

The Operational Food Assistance Programme provides support to people experiencing the deepest forms of poverty by offering assistance in the form of packages or meals. Food Banks (and their partner organisations) operate within this framework. According to a study on malnutrition and famine in Poland published by the Food Banks Federation (2023), in 2022 the Programme supported around 1.4 million people. At the same time, as many Food Bank partner organisations report increasing numbers of beneficiaries, the scale of poverty affecting people's access to food is likely to be larger than officially recorded, as many people do not choose to use the support due to shame and other (e.g. administrative) barriers to accessing free food.

3.3 Milk bars

Milk bars can be best described as low-cost, government-subsidised yet commercial restaurants that form an important link in the social assistance network. According to the Social Assistance Act of March 2004 "social assistance is also provided to individuals and families through subsidies for meals sold in milk bars". In addition to providing social support for those in need, milk bars are some of the most inclusive establishments in the (mostly urban) food scene. While they serve as venues where social assistance vouchers can be used, the lower prices of food sold in the milk bars attract people who face socio-economic restrictions as well as people who do not.

Milk bars have a long tradition in Poland: The first milk bar was established in Warsaw in 1896, leading to the creation of similar eateries across Poland (Bader, 2013). Their popularity surged after 1918 due to the post-war food price crisis, with ministerial regulations controlling meal sizes and prices to ensure that everyone could afford a warm meal. This model later inspired the leadership of the Polish People's Republic (PRL), with most milk bars opening after 1945. Milk bars have been popular until now, but they are becoming less economically viable to sustain and thus their numbers are declining. They are mainly concentrated in larger cities: For instance, around 40 milk bars are believed to operate in Warsaw alone (Sławiński, 2023).

Many milk bar owners don't apply for support due to complicated bureaucracy and regulations. As a result, it is difficult to know how many of them actually operate in Poland. Yet, a proportion of them are still able to stay in business thanks to state subsidies, support from local governments and continued interest from the public.

The regulatory framework for milk bar subsidies in Poland has undergone transformations since 2015, with particularly notable changes in 2022. The latest regulations increased government support while implementing stricter price controls: Restaurants now receive a 70% subsidy on raw materials, but must maintain their mark-up within 45% of the value of the raw materials. Despite maintaining a consistent annual budget of approximately 20 million Polish złoty (4.7 million euros) between 2015 and 2022, the actual distribution of

funds fell considerably short of the planned allocations.⁴ The Annual Budget Implementation Reports by the Polish Ministry of Finance indicate that in some years (e.g. in 2015 and 2021), only about half of the budgeted amounts were utilised. The 2022 regulatory reforms initiated a period of substantial budget increases⁵ which appears to be reversing, as the 2025 national budget proposal indicates a planned reduction of 10 million Polish złoty (2.4 million euros) compared to 2024 levels (Ministry of Finance, 2024c).

Although subsidies do not apply to meat, resulting in a price difference between meat and vegetarian dishes, milk bars are not yet institutions that focus on promoting healthy or plant-based options. In fact, they often offer more meat-based meals than vegetarian alternatives. This is one of the reasons why they are criticised by food and nutrition advocates (Tubilewicz, 2022). On the other hand, there are also businesses that are classified by law as milk bars, which are chain restaurants serving vegetarian food or other affordable eateries. More generally, it is hard to evaluate the impact of the milk bar policy as, according to our knowledge, no formal assessment has been conducted at national level.

Overall, milk bars, despite their financial and nutritional challenges, are an important part of the social support system in Poland. They provide affordable meals to people from all social backgrounds, fostering a sense of community and dignity among poorer members of society who may not qualify for or feel ashamed to use other forms of food support. By hosting a diverse clientele, they promote inclusivity and egalitarian values. With some additional effort, milk bars could also play a significant role in encouraging healthier dietary habits.

3.4 Concluding remarks on social policy for combating food poverty

Although Poland's social system is relatively well-developed in supporting those in need, the rates of food poverty continue to increase. There is also a link between health status and socio-economic status: Data from the National Institute of Public Health shows that the issue of excessive body weight is more prevalent among individuals of lower economic status (Green Rev Institute, 2024). Additional concerns thus relate to the nutritional quality of the products provided to those in need and the health consequences resulting from their consumption (Food Banks Federation, 2023). Moreover, beneficiaries of food support programs often lack agency over their dietary choices, which has implications for both their ability to cure health conditions and their feeling of dignity.

4 Author's review of National Annual Budgets and Annual Budget Implementation Reports prepared for the Polish Ministry of Finance.

5 The initial allocation rose to PLN 25 million (€5.9 million) in 2021, followed by further expansions to PLN 34.4 million (€8.1 million) in 2023 and PLN 71.3 million (€16.7 million) in 2024. Notably, the 2023 implementation exceeded the planned figures by approximately PLN 10 million (€2.3 million).

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Case study #7: Portugal

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SUMMARY

Development of national food policy and food strategy

Portugal does not yet have a comprehensive food strategy. The main guiding plan is the National Programme for the Promotion of Healthy Eating which has been running since 2012. It focuses on promoting healthy and nutritious diets, tackling childhood malnutrition and social inequalities. Although legislative measures have been introduced to promote sustainable and healthy diets, a fragmented governance approach in Portugal has missed the opportunity to link agricultural, environmental and climate, health and land access elements, which are key to developing a holistic food policy strategy. Importantly, this national programme plays a significant role in addressing public procurement and promoting plant-based diets, particularly from a consumer perspective, which is an important step towards a more integrated approach to food policy.

Focus area 1 – Mandatory vegetarian options in public canteens

Since 2017, a national law requires all public canteens and cafeterias (schools, hospitals, universities, prisons, etc.) to include at least one vegetarian option (defined as an option that does not contain any animal products, therefore vegan) on all daily menus. Exemptions may apply. The law's adoption followed a parliamentary debate spurred by a citizens' petition. In addition to health, environmental and animal welfare arguments, proponents argued that the law would allow proper respect for "freedom of food choice". Reporting, compliance mechanisms and supporting toolkits have been put in place, but full implementation has proved difficult. Insufficient demand and increased food waste were cited as the main reasons for non-compliance.

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1 An overview of Portuguese food policies

Portugal's advances towards a national food strategy have aligned with the priorities of the European Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), especially after it joined the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1986 (Graça and Gregório, 2012). Until the 1970s, food policies in Portugal focused on maximising agricultural production, while the 1980s and 1990s saw the inclusion of sanitary measures along the food value chains to guarantee consumers' food safety. By the turn of the new century, diet-related non-communicable diseases (e.g. childhood obesity) had become a significant global concern (INSA, 2021), which helped to stimulate a shift in policy from an agricultural to a nutritional and health approach.

In Portugal, the development of food and nutrition policies in the context of health promotion had begun in the 1980s, with food consumption and nutrition playing a major role in the construction of public health policies. Since 2012, the Portuguese National Programme for the Promotion of Healthy Eating (PNPAS) has been considered a priority national health programme.

From 2012 to 2019, the PNPAS was an important framework for the promotion of healthy and nutritious diets in Portugal, addressing concerns about childhood malnutrition and obesity, consumption of unhealthy food items such as ultra-processed foods and/or foods containing toxins that migrate from the soil to the plate, and socio-economic disparities (PNPAS, 2024). Data from the COSI 2019 Portugal study, coordinated by the Ricardo Jorge National Health Institute (INSA), revealed that the prevalence of childhood obesity was higher than the EU average (WHO, 2022)¹.

The PNPAS consists of a transversal set of actions coordinated at national level, focusing on the promotion of healthy eating habits, but less on an integrated approach that considers the role of food production, processing and distribution. Specifically, it works through a concerted and integrated set of actions seeking to improve the dietary habits of the population, its nutritional status and health by intervening at the level of their food environments, at the household level and at the level of health care, following the guidelines by the European Commission and the World Health Organization (PNPAS, 2024; Graça et al., 2021).

Instruments used by the PNPAS include the introduction of legislative measures aimed at encouraging healthier eating habits and ensuring access to sustainable food options, especially for children from an early age.² Efforts have focused on adopting a consumer protection approach, centred around promoting a precautionary health care system and social inclusion. Some of these measures have targeted the food offer at public canteens, including the School Fruit Scheme (Order no. 37/2024) intended to distribute fruit and vegetables to elementary school pupils and the introduction of mandatory vegetarian options in public canteens, among many others (DGS, 2022). The latter will be described in more detail below.

More recently, in the context of the national energy and climate plans by European member states (NECP), Portugal has proposed to promote low-carbon diets from 2024 to 2030 (EU Commission, 2024), including the announcement of a national strategy "to promote the consumption of plant protein". It aims to encourage the production and consumption of leguminous crops to support self-sufficiency and food sovereignty. It will also

1 In Europe, childhood obesity is slightly lower than in Portugal (29% versus 31%), with one out of three children aged 7–9 considered overweight (INSA, 2019).

2 A few legal instruments have been put in place to protect the food offered at public schools. Law no. 30/2019 places restrictions on advertising food and drink products aimed at children under 16 that contain high levels of energy, salt, sugar, saturated fats and trans fats. In addition, Article 245 of Law no. 2/2020 obliges the government to establish conditions to limit the availability of unhealthy products in school vending machines, i.e. to regulate the times these machines are accessible and to ensure the quality of the items offered, with a particular focus on highly processed and sugary products, as well as the food meals served in school canteens. Order no. 10919/2017 controls the quality and quantity of food being served at public canteens.

focus on training, increasing the availability of plant-based meals in public canteens and raising awareness of the benefits of plant proteins through educational campaigns.

This case study focuses on the Portuguese legal requirement for all public canteens and cafeterias to include at least one vegetarian option as an example of a demand-side intervention that can be implemented as part of a more integrated national food policy.

2 Mandatory vegetarian options in public canteens

Law no. 11/2017 requires public canteens and cafeterias in the country to include at least one vegetarian option on all daily menus. The law defines a “vegetarian option” as a meal that contains no animal products, a dietary option that the Ministry of Health argues is not only beneficial to health, but also has a lower environmental impact than animal-based diets (DGE, 2018). The law applies to all institutions that receive public funding and have a cafeteria or dining hall, including schools, universities, hospitals, homes for the elderly, nursing homes and prisons. The law specifies that the vegan menu options must be planned by a licensed nutrition specialist. In case of low demand for vegetarian options (also to avoid food waste), canteens can either set up a pre-registration system or be exempt from the requirements of the law.

2.1 Overview of the debate that led to the Law

The appearance of Law no. 11/2017 followed an important public parliamentary debate in Portugal, which took place on 17 June 2016. The debate focused on a law proposal to implement vegetarian meals in public canteens that was closely linked to a grassroots movement led by the Portuguese Vegetarian Association (APV), namely the Petição pela inclusão de opções vegetarianas nas escolas, universidades e hospitais portugueses. The petition, which had gathered around 15 000 signatures in support of more inclusive dietary options, exceeded the minimum number of signatures required for a public plenary³ and was discussed in the parliamentary plenary session in June 2016. The petition highlighted the widespread support for vegetarian options and bolstered the case for legislative action.

The initiative, spearheaded by the PAN (People-Animals-Nature) political party and supported by the Left Bloc (BE) and the Green Party (PEV), was driven by a combination of health, ethical, environmental and pedagogical motivations. Another key factor was the framing of the issue as one of democracy rather than values. The parliamentary majority expressed their agreement with the concept of “freedom of food choice”, emphasising the importance of providing diverse dietary options to cater to different preferences and needs. PAN underscored the need to combat discrimination against individuals who follow a vegetarian diet, advocating for their right to have suitable meal options in public institutions.

The health benefits of vegetarian diets presented at the debate provided a compelling argument for the inclusion of vegetarian meals in public canteens, not only to accommodate dietary preferences but also to promote public health. For instance, according to the Ministry of Health, vegetarian diets can significantly reduce the prevalence of several major health issues, including cancer, obesity, cardiovascular disease, hyperlipidemia (elevated blood fats), hypertension and diabetes (DGS, 2016).

3 At the time in Portugal, petitions with at least 4 000 signatures would be considered for public discussion in the parliament. Today this number is 7 500.

The ethical considerations of the proposal also resonated with many of the arguments put forward by parliamentarians during the debate. Vegetarian diets were said to be chosen often for ethical reasons, such as concerns about animal welfare and the desire to promote short food supply chains. Environmental concerns were another crucial factor in supporting the proposal. It has been argued that plant-based diets have a lower environmental impact compared to diets derived from resource-intensive food chains (Morena, 2020). According to Portugal's Ministry of Education, the adoption of vegetarian meals in public institutions could contribute to reducing the country's carbon footprint and promote sustainability (DGE, 2018).

The inclusion of vegetarian options in schools, universities and other public institutions was also framed from a pedagogical and educational perspective. On the one hand, the inclusion of vegetarian options expose students and the wider public to diverse dietary practices and the benefits of plant-based nutrition, encouraging healthier eating habits from a young age. On the other hand, it aligns with the national effort since 2012 to protect the Mediterranean Diet, considered part of UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, while promoting Portugal's food traditions (Assembleia da República, 2024).

As with any national law, monitoring and compliance mechanisms were spelled out under this mandate. The Food and Economic Safety Authority (ASAE) is responsible in Portugal for ensuring compliance with legislation regulating economic activities in the food sector. ASAE's role includes monitoring public canteens and cafeterias to ensure that they comply with the requirements of the Ministry of Health, including those of Law no. 11/2017. This monitoring role was specified in the legislation to help maintain the quality and availability of vegetarian options, thereby supporting the objectives of the law.

2.2 Challenges in implementing vegetarian options

Despite the legislative framework, there are challenges in implementing vegetarian options in public establishments. Studies by the Portuguese Vegetarian Association (AVP) and the General Directorate of School Establishments (DGEstE) assessed the implementation of Law no. 11/2017 and examined consumers' perceptions about the vegetarian meals offered in public canteens (AVP, 2019; AVP, 2022; DGEstE, 2022). The main identified shortcomings included: unavailability of vegetarian options in some canteens, perceived lack of nutritional balance of vegetarian meals, allegations that some vegetarian meals contained animal products and reduced awareness and compliance with the law (AVP 2019).

Primary and secondary schools were noted as the establishments most lacking in vegetarian options (AVP, 2019; AVP, 2022). Possible reasons for the incomplete implementation that have been reported are the following: Vegetarian meals were often perceived to lack proper nutritional balance. In the 2019 study with 95 participants, 31% of respondents did not opt for vegetarian meals due to concerns about nutritional balance (AVP, 2019). Second, consumers did not know how to proceed in case canteens did not comply with the law. Scant or no contact with the ASAE, the authority responsible for monitoring compliance, was reported in the two studies. Thirdly, low demand appeared as one of the main reasons why municipalities did not offer vegetarian options (AVP, 2019; AVP, 2022).

2.3 Addressing the challenges

To address these challenges of implementing Law no. 11/2017, capacity building for kitchen and canteen management staff has become a focus of the public and policy debate, e.g. including plant-based workshops alongside nutrition specialists; and displaying the Ministry of Health's guidelines for vegetarian meals at school canteens (Lima, 2018). Similarly, creating a suitable food environment to promote plant-based diets in

public establishments, facilitating better communication channels for consumers and improving reporting mechanisms to ensure compliance and address issues of non-availability are at the centre of the debate (AVP, 2022; DGS, 2022).

In conclusion, the Portuguese case demonstrates that framing is a key component of policymaking. In this case, an efficient and multi-argument framing paved the way for the implementation of the requirement to develop vegetarian/vegan menus in school canteens. The country is gradually moving towards a food policy with a more holistic approach where the promotion of plant-based foods supports various objectives. Implementation challenges remain, although the solutions seem close at hand.

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Case study #8: Spain

Inma Batalla (BC3), Víctor Martínez (BC3) | March 2025

SUMMARY

Development of national food policy and food strategy

Recent food-related policies in Spain have focused on relationships within the food chain, food prices and waste reduction. However, there is growing momentum for food strategies and policies at regional and local levels. In addition, the government has just developed a National Food Strategy, covering a range of issues from sustainability and food security to nutrition and rural areas. It was published in February 2025.

Focus area 1 – The Food Chain Law

In 2013 a first Food Chain Law was published, then revised several times. It established a Food Chain Observatory, the Food Information and Control Agency and introduced mandatory written contracts between food operators. A 2020 revision mandates each actor in the food chain to buy at a price that covers the seller's production costs.

Focus area 2 – 0% VAT on fruits and vegetables

In 2023, a temporary reduction of the VAT (from 4% to 0%) on essential food items such as wheat products; fruits, vegetables and legumes; potatoes as well as milk, cheese and eggs was introduced. A first analysis of the data shows that the decline in fruit and vegetable consumption stabilised after the implementation of the tax reduction.

Focus area 3 – Food Waste Law

The food waste law was approved in March 2025 after a long parliamentary process. This new legal framework builds upon the implementation of two previous national programs addressing the issue in 2013–2016 and 2017–2020, which focused on education and voluntary sector agreements. The framework law will introduce a “food waste hierarchy” and require food system actors to develop food waste reduction plans.

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1 Introduction

The agri-food sector is traditionally important, contributing almost 9% of Spain's GDP and providing 11% of employment (Maudos & Salamanca, 2024). Historically, Spain's approach to national food policy has primarily been managed by the agricultural authorities, though not exclusively.

In July 2024, the Spanish government announced the development of the first National Food Strategy. It was published at the beginning of February 2025. It focuses on seven strategic areas: stability of food supply; sustainability of the food system; strengthening rural and coastal areas; encouraging healthy diets; fostering innovation; promoting transparency and accessibility of food information for consumers. These will serve as the basis for further policy development in the agri-food sector. The measures discussed in this case study aim to address structural inequalities in the system and promote more sustainable practices. Key initiatives in that regard include the Food Chain Law, which aims to ensure transparency along the food chain. We analyse the reduction in taxes on basic foodstuffs, mainly due to the Ukraine crisis, and its impact on food prices. Another notable initiative is the proposed Food Waste Law. This draft law focuses on the prevention and management of food waste and highlights efforts to address food waste at various points in the supply chain. At the time of writing, it had not yet been implemented. This case study, however, does not provide an analysis of the recently published Food Strategy. While this case study focuses on national food policy in Spain, it is important to note that there is a long-established and growing momentum for food policy at the regional and local level. This is based on the Spanish governance structure, with shared and specific competences at different levels, from national to local. These levels of governance should work in an interconnected manner, as established by the Spanish Constitution and the statutes of autonomy of the autonomous communities (NUTS 2 level). Many of these regional initiatives like the Agro-Food Strategy 2025 of the city of Valencia, the Catalonia Food Strategic Plan 2021–2026, the Sustainable Food Strategy Plan of the city of Vitoria-Gasteiz and the Network of Municipalities for Agroecology originated in cities and territories that signed the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact.

2 The Food Chain Law

The current Food Chain Law is a series of amendments to a previous law that came into force in August 2013. Initially, the law sought to improve the functioning of the Spanish food chain, with the main objective of ensuring effectiveness and fair competition between the different actors in the system. It took into account that the food sector is composed of a wide variety of actors, from small farmers to big agri-food companies, which in turn creates great asymmetries in terms of negotiating power, among other things. The purpose of the law was to prevent the abuse of power and to protect smaller actors, especially primary producers. In its first version, the Spanish Food Chain Law mandated formal written contracts between food chain operators, outlining specific content such as prices, discounts and payment conditions while prohibiting abusive practices like unilateral contract modifications and extra payments. It also established the Food Chain

Observatory¹ and the Food Information and Control Agency² and tasked the Ministry of Food and Agriculture and sector stakeholders with developing a code of best practice for food-related contracts.

The 2020 amendment to the Spanish Food Chain Law requires food prices paid by each tier of the agri-food chain to cover the production costs of the previous tier to prevent “value destruction”, a measure introduced in 2019 that was not required by the EU’s Directive on Unfair Trading Practices. The 2021 modification of the Spanish Food Chain Law maintained this requirement, introduced a registry for food contracts and modifications and transposed Directive (EU) 2019/633, expanding the list of abusive practices initially outlined in the 2013 law.

Farmers’ protests in early 2024 over their vulnerable situation in the agri-food chain have prompted Spanish authorities to approve a new amendment to the law. Producers argued, among other things, that the control of abusive practices was too lenient and the sanctions too low to reduce the power imbalances between actors in the chain, leading the government to implement stronger enforcement measures. After the protests, the third and fourth trimesters of 2024 were the periods with the highest penalties for non-compliance with the Food Chain Law.³ However, challenges remain in the implementation of the law and continued criticism from producers who report that power imbalances still exist in the food chain may suggest that the law needs to be complemented by other initiatives to improve the situation. The concept of a food chain observatory as created by the Food Chain Law, was later taken up at EU level: In mid-March 2024, the EU Commission proposed the creation of the EU Agriculture and Food Chain Observatory (AFCO) to monitor costs, margins and trading practices in the agri-food chain in order to increase transparency among actors in the European food chain.

3 0% VAT on fruits and vegetables

In late 2022, against the backdrop of rising food prices due to factors such as the recovery from the Covid-19 crisis, the war in Ukraine and the proliferation of various extreme climatic events affecting crops, the Spanish government announced a series of measures to address food prices and ensure food security. To this end, the government offered a 200-euro aid to low-income households in summer 2022 and winter 2023 (not restricted to food), which people could apply for (Sangiao, 2024).⁴ However, the policy did not reach as many households as it was initially intended to.⁵

In addition, the Spanish government announced a temporary reduction of the Value Added Tax (VAT) on essential food items from January 2023. VAT on bread, flour, milk, cheese, eggs, fruit, vegetables, legumes, potatoes and cereals was reduced from 4% (“super reduced VAT”) to 0%. Oil and dry pasta⁶ were also subject to VAT reductions (from 10% to 5%). This policy was abandoned by the Spanish government and has been

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- 1 Officially constituted in 2015, the Food Chain Observatory is a collegiate body attached to the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food that seeks to promote transparency in the relationships between actors in the Spanish food chain in order to detect imbalances along it. It issues reports on the value chain of certain foods. It also shows weekly prices at origin and wholesale market for a selection of 34 foods, including vegetables, fruit, eggs, meat and fish.
 - 2 Government agency linked to the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture, Fishing and Foods (MAPA) responsible for the control of the fulfilment of the Food Chain Law and the information systems of different strategic food products. Its creation led to increased transparency in the food chain, including through the obligation to register food contracts on a digital platform.
 - 3 Until October 2024, the penalties imposed in the third and fourth trimesters of 2024 reached 600 000 euros, whereas previously, since 2023, they had barely reached 700 000 euros.
 - 4 Sangiao, Sergio. “La ayuda de 200 euros de Sánchez para familias vulnerables no ha llegado ni a un tercio de los beneficiarios esperados”. Público, 11 February 2024. <https://www.publico.es/politica/ayuda-200-euros-sanchez-familias-vulnerables-no-llegado-tercio-beneficiarios-esperados.html>
 - 5 This happened mainly because of the bureaucratic procedure applicants had to follow, having only the possibility of doing it online and having a short period of time to apply for it.
 - 6 The case of the VAT on oil is special, as it was also reduced from 5% to 0% in July 2024, and rose again to 2% in October and to 4% in January 2025.

gradually reversed. The VAT of the two food groups was first raised to 2% and 7.5%, respectively, in October 2024, and to their original rates from January 2025 on. Fish and meat were neither included in the initial measure nor in the different extensions despite recommendations from different consumer organisations and the fish and meat sectors (Lomba, 2023). During the Covid-19 pandemic, food insecurity in Spanish households increased, as shown by Moragues-Faus and Magaña-González (2022) between July 2020 and July 2021. As no new data has been collected on the state of food insecurity in Spain in the current context of disruption to the global food system, it is not known whether this trend is continuing.

According to the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture, Fishing and Foods (MAPA), the consumption of basic food items (mainly fresh fruit and vegetables) systematically decreased among the Spanish population during 2022 (MAPA, 2022). Monthly data provided by MAPA⁷ shows, however, that the consumption of those food items tended to stabilise after the implementation of the VAT reduction, even if current consumption levels are still far from the ones in January 2022, i.e. before the pandemic.⁸ This stabilisation may be attributed to the VAT reduction. However, there is no research to show to what extent this is the case. Some work has examined the VAT reduction on essential food items, focusing mainly on its distributional and price effects. Although these studies are still very preliminary and acknowledge the tentative impact of the VAT reduction policy, they do show a considerable translation to food prices, at least in the weeks immediately following the implementation of the measure (De Amores Hernández et al., 2023). Moreover, the policy appeared to have a modest progressive effect in that it benefited the lowest-income households more in proportion to their total expenses, although as expenses grow in line with income, the bulk of the VAT reduction in absolute terms benefited higher-income households (Almunia et al., 2023). However, there is still a lack of studies measuring the impact of the VAT reduction on the consumption of specific food groups.

4 Food Waste Law

Since 2022, the Spanish government has been developing its first legal framework to combat food waste. After extensive deliberations and revisions, a draft law was approved in January 2024. However, the final version of the law was not officially passed until March 2025, following a prolonged parliamentary process. Prior to this, a National Strategy Against Food Waste had been developed between 2013 and 2020 under the name More food, less waste. Programme for the reduction of food waste and the recovery of food discards. The project was divided into two phases (2013–2016, 2017–2020). During the first phase, a quantification of food waste was carried out. In collaboration with food chain actors and public administrations, the project also developed actions to inform about food waste and raise awareness through campaigns, events, webinars and the publication of numerous documents (for example, Food waste report in the industry and distribution sector in Spain in October 2020 and Catalogue of national and international initiatives on food waste in 2022). During the second phase, the focus shifted to activities with a potentially higher impact, such as sectoral agreements to reduce food waste, activities to foster more direct relationships between producers and consumers and ones focusing on the interconnections between food waste and environmental degradation (MAPA, 2021). However, activities under the Food Waste Strategy to prevent food waste have so far not gone beyond education, recommendations, voluntary agreements and self-regulation of the actors in the food chain.

The new food waste law in Spain now takes a more comprehensive approach, targeting production, distribution and consumption aspects in the food chain. It addresses the significant issue of food waste in Spain and

7 Data available through the following link: <https://www.mapa.gob.es/es/alimentacion/temas/consumo-tendencias/panel-de-consumo-alimentario/ultimos-datos/mes-a-mes-alimentacion.aspx>.

8 According to the MAPA database, the per capita consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables in January 2022 was, in terms of Moving Annual Totals (MAT), at 91.07 kg and 77.58 kg respectively. In June 2024 (most recent data), it was at 78.38 kg and 67.87 kg respectively.

identifies potential causes, such as poor planning, improper production and handling practices, inadequate storage and retail selling techniques (e.g. incorporation of fruits and vegetables that don't meet cosmetic standards in sales lines, discounts for products with a close best-before date) and consumer behaviour. The objectives of the law are linked to UN and EU food waste reduction objectives, but it does not set its own objectives. The law also requires all actors in the Spanish food chain (including industry, restaurants, caterers, canteens, retailers) to create a food waste prevention plan. It also provides for sanctions in the absence of a prevention plan. Under this plan, the actors in the food chain are required to carry out a diagnosis of the areas where food waste occurs in their respective production processes. The law also establishes a hierarchy for managing surplus food (MAPA, 2024).⁹ The hierarchy is as follows:

1. donation or redistribution for human consumption
2. transformation into products like juices or marmalades for human consumption
3. animal feed
4. production of industrial by-products
5. composting and biofuel production.

For the donation of food surpluses, actors in the food chain will have to enter into collaboration agreements with companies, social initiative entities, other non-profit organisations or food banks. Activities carried out in premises with a usable sales and display area of 1 300 square metres or less are excluded from this obligation.

9 "El Gobierno pone en marcha el proyecto de ley de prevención de las pérdidas y el desperdicio alimentario". Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Foods, 9th January 2024. <https://www.mapa.gob.es/en/prensa/ultimas-noticias/el-gobierno-pone-en-marcha-el-proyecto-de-ley-de-prevenci%C3%B3n-de-las-p%C3%A9rdidas-y-el-desperdicio-alimentario/tcm:30-673097>

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Case study #9: Sweden

Jonna Wiklund, Ivar Virgin, Madeleine Fogde, Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) |
March 2024

SUMMARY

Development of national food policy and food strategy

Sweden adopted its first National Food Strategy in 2017. It emphasises competitiveness and food production but also encompasses other objectives, including sustainability. The Ministry of Rural Affairs and Infrastructure is the responsible ministry, with several government agencies also playing a role in its implementation. The impact of the strategy has been analysed as limited, e.g. in terms of achieving relevant environmental objectives and healthy diets. A possible contributing factor is the lack of a strong common vision among government actors that would support a coherent food policy. In 2023, the government announced an update of the strategy to focus on improved robustness in the food chain, exports and Swedish quality and gastronomy, which was published in March 2025.

Focus area 1 – Free and more sustainable meals in public procurement

Since the 1970s, most Swedish school children have received free school lunches, and since 1997, all school children have a legal right to free meals. The composition of the meals should be based on the Nordic Nutrition Recommendations. The creation of the Swedish Competence Centre for Public Meals in 2011 has been instrumental in promoting a holistic view on school meals, including environmental aspects, and encouraging plant-based meals, labelled products as well as the reduction of food waste through data collection, guidelines, outreach and the sharing of best practices among local authorities.

Focus area 2 – Organic food in public procurement

Organic food consumption in the public sector had a 60% target by 2030 (reaching 39% in 2019). The national objective provided guidance to local authorities. National bodies such as the Board of Agriculture have been respectively tasked with promoting organic consumption and the National Agency for Public Procurement has elaborated green criteria for public procurement.

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1 Introduction

The Swedish parliament adopted its first comprehensive food strategy in 2017. The strategy, called A National Food Strategy for Sweden – more jobs and sustainable growth throughout the country aims for “a competitive food supply chain that increases overall food production while achieving the relevant national environmental objectives, aiming to generate growth and employment and contribute to sustainable development throughout the country.” The strategy outlines three strategic areas: rules and regulations, consumers and markets as well as knowledge and innovation, each with a defined but non-quantified objective.

Even though the strategy aims to achieve different goals, the emphasis remains on the competitiveness of the Swedish food system and increasing food production. This focus stems from Swedish food system actors experiencing challenges in competing internationally as well as stagnant productivity and profitability in primary production. These issues had been on the political agenda for several years and the formulation of the strategy was preceded by a 2015 inquiry on the competitiveness of Swedish agriculture, made on behalf of the government. Furthermore, the initiative *Sweden – the new culinary nation (Sverige – det nya matlandet)* had been launched as early as 2007, aimed at strengthening the Swedish food chain and supporting rural development. However, this initiative was not presented as a strategy and was not adopted by parliament.

Since the adoption of the Food Strategy in 2017, three action plans have been developed for its implementation. The most extensive action plan is the second one, covering the years 2020 to 2025, with 122 million Swedish kronor (~11 million euros) allocated each year. The Ministry of Rural Affairs and Infrastructure¹ is the responsible ministry. Several government agencies², academia and the private sector (through Business Sweden) have been engaged to implement the strategy. Social and environmental agencies were also involved, but to a lesser extent. In implementing the strategy, there have been collaborative efforts to include various actors and sectors and to address the whole food chain from farm to fork. Despite this, some parts of value chain are involved and targeted to a larger extent than others and it has been noted that there is potential to increase engagements with retail and restaurants (Hallencreutz et al., 2024).

The Swedish Board of Agriculture monitors and evaluates the strategy annually, using indicators linked to the three pillars of sustainability (economic, environmental and social). The results show that there is no statistically significant trend in profitability, competitiveness and production within the Swedish food chain. Furthermore, the latest report concludes that (i) while some indicators are developing in the right direction, for example greenhouse gas emissions, none of the relevant national environmental objectives are considered achievable by 2030, and (ii) unhealthy diets are an increasing problem (Jordbruksverket, 2024). The limited impact of the strategy is confirmed in another analysis (Hallencreutz et al., 2024). This view is shared by many food system actors and farmers who have expressed that positive effects at farm level are missing.

Moreover, various processes have identified a lack of common vision, coherence and integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainability in Swedish food policy (Government Offices of Sweden, 2021; Livsmedelsverket, 2022a; Jordbruksverket, 2021). The Swedish Food Agency led a process initiated in 2019 to develop a common vision for sustainable food systems among government agencies, which highlighted the need for more collaboration between agencies. Increased cooperation would improve understanding of trade-offs and synergies to achieve a food system that is sustainable in all respects

1 Responsible for matters relating to rural areas, agriculture and food production, regional development, transport and infrastructure, housing and spatial planning.

2 Including the Swedish National Food Agency, the Swedish Board of Agriculture and the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth.

(Livsmedelsverket, 2022a). Similar findings were reported by the Board of Agriculture in a study on sustainable food systems (Jordbruksverket, 2021).

In March 2025, Sweden's new centre-right government³ presented their update of the strategy, reflecting its priorities as well as recent changes and challenges, including extreme weather events, the Covid-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The update did not provide any new strategic direction or change any of the overarching goals. Three new focus areas for implementation were presented; improved robustness in the food chain, export, and Swedish quality and gastronomy.

Two examples of progressive sectoral food policies partly connected to the Food Strategy and the focus of this case study, are the Swedish approach to **free school meals** and **organic food in public procurement**.

2 Free and more sustainable meals in schools

Sweden has a long history of providing free school meals, a policy that was first introduced in the mid-1900s. The policy was gradually rolled out at municipal level and by the 1970s, most Swedish school children were receiving free school lunches. By 1997, the right of all school children to be served nutritious hot meals for free was established in the Swedish Education Act (SFS 2010:800). Municipalities are responsible for serving and financing these meals. Lundborg et al. (2022) examined the long-term effects of the Swedish free school meal policy and found positive effects on lifetime income, with larger effects among students from low-income households. Additional benefits include improvement in early adult health and educational attainment.

Initially, the Swedish school meal policy aimed to provide safe and nutritious meals as part of the welfare system and to reduce socio-economic inequalities. Nutrition is still one of the main objectives of the programme. School meals should be based on the Nordic Nutrition Recommendations⁴ and provide approximately one third of the daily nutritional intake. However, in light of current challenges, school meals are also seen as a tool to achieve other societal goals, such as a sustainable and resilient food system and a healthy population.

Broadening the view on school meals has been a clear focus of the Swedish Competence Centre for Public Meals, a key player in Swedish school food policy. The Centre was launched in 2011, to serve as a resource and convenor for policymakers at regional and local level, as well as decision-makers and employees in relevant municipal services and other government agencies. The Competence Centre has been funded through the Food Strategy since 2017. The Strategy sets out that public procurement should reflect animal welfare and environmental aspirations and increase the population's knowledge about food and food production. One of the main achievements of the Centre are the National Guidelines for School Meals based on a holistic model for meals that considers six areas: taste, enjoyment (e.g. creating a pleasant food environment in canteens), safety, nutrition, eco-friendliness and the integration of school meals in the educational work.

The Competence Centre has also gathered data on school meal consumption and waste as well as local policies and targets for school meals. It has engaged in outreach, dialogue and gathering of good examples and best practices. While the Swedish model of municipal self-government allows municipalities to make independent decisions about school meals (e.g. setting their own goals and actions), national policies and support from networks have been identified as enabling factors in promoting sustainable food consumption at the municipal

³ In office since October 2022.

⁴ The Nordic Recommendations were updated in 2023, for the first time including environmental and climate impact. There is ongoing work in Sweden to translate the recommendations to national dietary guidelines.

level (Dawkins et al., 2023). For instance, the National Guidelines for School Meals have been widely incorporated in food policies at municipal level and most Swedish municipalities have goals for the procurement of food products with sustainability labels such as organic, local or fair trade. About a third of the municipalities have a climate impact target and a significant number have goals for reducing food loss and waste. Around six out of ten municipalities offer a vegetarian option to all school children every day (Livsmedelsverket, 2022b).

The Competence Centre has identified several successful strategies, including continuous dialogue with target groups to provide relevant support, outreach and communication activities as well as data collection⁵ to inform decision-making. A key challenge for reaching further is that meal provision and education are often governed by separate organisations at both the school and municipal levels as well as at agencies and ministries. One potential solution is for the political leadership to place greater emphasis on the integration of school meals into educational activities, for example by prioritising this integration in directives to the National Agency for Education.

3 Organic food in public procurement

The only area in the Swedish Food Strategy where there has been a quantified goal is organic consumption and production. The strategy states that production and consumption should increase, with the target that 60% of food in the public sector should be organic by 2030. However, the target is not part of the strategy adopted by parliament but was established in one of the government's action plans.⁶ Before that, in 2006, the government had set a goal of 25% organic food in public procurement by 2010 (Government communication, 2006). This target was reached in 2014 (Ekomatcentrum, 2015).

The Swedish governance strategy for organic food in public procurement is characterised by a limited role of the national government, where the national goal serves as an orientation rather than a requirement for local and regional actors, who are left to set their own goals and develop measures to reach them (Daugbjerg, 2023). Still, data on organic food in public procurement suggest that there is an uptake of national targets among local actors, leading many municipalities to formulate and pursue their own specified targets (Lindström et al., 2022). In 2017, 88% of Swedish municipalities had goals for the share of organic food in their procurement, with more than half aiming to procure between 26 and 50% organic food (Ekomatcentrum, 2018). The share of organic food in public procurement had been increasing steadily for many years, reaching an average of 39% (in value) in 2019 (Ekomatcentrum, 2023).

Some activities to increase organic products in public procurement have been undertaken as part of the National Food Strategy. Between 2017 and 2023, 137 million Swedish kronor (~12 million euros) were allocated to the Board of Agriculture to promote organic production and consumption. Two of the activities related to public procurement were the education of staff in the public sector to increase knowledge about organic food and the collection of data on the public procurement of organic food.⁷ The Food Strategy has also been linked to public procurement by the National Agency for Public Procurement, which has developed criteria that municipalities can use to include sustainability requirements in their procurement in line with the Food Strategy.

⁵ Through surveys sent out to municipalities.

⁶ [Action plan 2](#) from 20th December 2019.

⁷ Data collection has been carried out by the organisation [Ekomatcentrum](#) through surveys for several years (first time in 1999). In recent years, a [new database](#) for statistics on public food has been established by MATtanken and the Board of Agriculture.

However, the trend towards organic in public procurement has reversed in recent years. In 2023, only 34% of food procured in the public sector was organic (Organic Sweden et al., 2023). This is still significantly higher than the share of organic food bought in retail stores, which was 5.6% of total sales in 2023 (Organic Sweden et al., 2023). Similarly, the number of municipalities with specified targets for procurement of organic food has been declining since 2017, to 62% in 2022 (Ekomatcentrum, 2023).

There are several possible explanations for this recent decline. These include rising food costs, as reducing the share of organic food is one strategy for municipalities to cope with price increases (Skolverket, 2023). Another factor is the ongoing debate in Sweden about which type of agriculture is most sustainable, with various aspects of sustainability, such as organic, local and climate-smart sometimes being pitted against each other. In addition, the recent focus on resilience and self-sufficiency has shifted attention towards locally or nationally produced food, rather than organic. The government's time-limited assignment to support organic production and consumption ended in 2023 and the current Swedish government has abandoned the quantified targets for organic production and consumption. The long-term effects of these economic and political changes are yet to be seen.

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Case study #10: Switzerland

Dr. Lukas Fesenfeld, Sol Kislig, ETH Zurich | April 2025

SUMMARY

Development of national food policy and food strategy

Traditionally, food policy debates in Switzerland have focused either on demand-side health-related nutrition strategies or on supporting domestic agricultural production, its environmental impacts and self-sufficiency, rather than taking a more holistic food system approach and linking these perspectives. The resulting policy mix is not yet systematically integrated into a coherent food policy strategy but addresses similar objectives with different approaches, indicators and time horizons. In recent years, however, sustainability and broader food system perspectives have become more salient in policy debates, leading to discussions on an integrated food system policy, notably in the context of the Climate Strategy for Agriculture and Food, the new Swiss Nutritional Strategy 2025–2032 and the current reform of Swiss agricultural policy.

Focus area 1 –

Involving experts and citizens to formulate integrated food policy recommendations

As part of the Ernährungszukunft Schweiz (The Future of Food in Switzerland) project, initiated in 2022, an independent scientific committee and a citizens' council have developed a pathway and specific recommendations for transforming the Swiss food system in line with the SDGs. Their reports were presented to the Federal Council in 2023. This work sparked both public and political debates. It also fed into discussions of policymakers and the administration responsible for food and agricultural policies, but also at local and cantonal level, around the development of new integrated food policies. Furthermore, the reports have influenced discussions and decision-making processes of key agricultural and food system stakeholders in Switzerland (e.g., farmer associations, retailers, NGOs etc).

Content: Switzerland

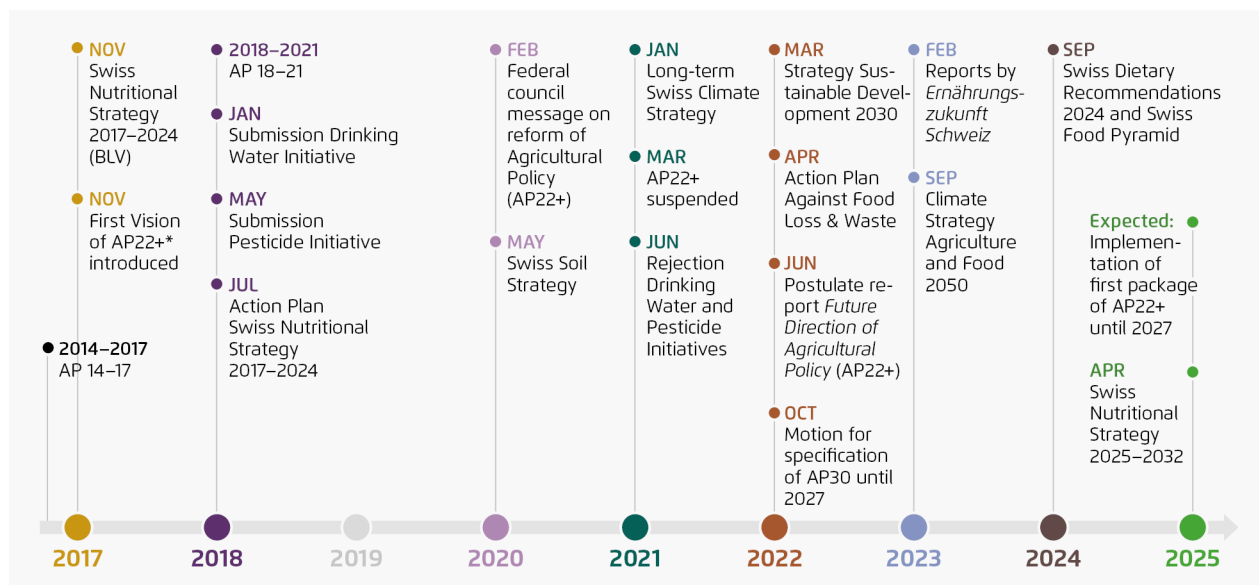
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1 Introduction

At the national level, the current Swiss food policy landscape is a mix of various strategy papers, reports and action plans published by the Federal Council¹, as well as by multiple federal departments, such as the Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office (BLV), the Federal Office for Agriculture (BLW) or the Federal Office for the Environment (BAFU) (see Figure 1 for a timeline of the most important national-level documents related to agricultural and food policy published in the past years). Moreover, Switzerland's federalist system has led to various policy developments on the cantonal and city level. However, these diverse strategies and action plans across different administrative units at the national as well as subnational levels are not yet integrated into one coherent food policy strategy. Instead, they address similar goals with distinct approaches, indicators and time horizons. Traditionally, food policy debates in Switzerland have either focused on health-related nutritional strategies on the demand side or on support for domestic agricultural production and self-sufficiency, rather than taking a more holistic food system approach and integrating the two. However, in the past few years, sustainability and broader food system perspectives have become more salient in policy debates, leading to discussions on an integrated food system policy, especially around the Climate Strategy for Agriculture and Food and the future of Swiss agricultural policy (AP).

Milestones of agri-food policies in Switzerland

→ Figure 1



Agora Agriculture (2025) based on Fesenfeld and Kislig (2024). Notes: *AP = Agricultural Policy

On the one hand, the latest Swiss Nutritional Strategy 2025–2032, published in April 2025, builds upon the previous Nutritional Strategy from 2017. While the prior strategy and its associated action plan primarily focused on promoting a balanced diet among the Swiss population and preventing non-communicable diseases, the new strategy adopts a more holistic approach. It addresses not only human health but also the environmental sustainability aspects of Swiss food consumption. Although the actual impact of these

1 The Swiss government consists of the seven members of the Federal Council. This is the executive branch of Switzerland. The president is elected for a one-year term of office and is regarded as "primus inter pares" or first among equals (The Federal Council, 2024b).

Nutritional Strategies on food system transformation – through changes in specific policy instruments and consumer behaviour – remains uncertain, they arguably represent an important first step toward integrating demand-side considerations into food and agricultural policy debates.

On the other hand, there are various policy documents and strategies regarding the transformation of agriculture in Switzerland. The current Swiss agricultural system is characterised by high direct payments, resource efficiency contributions for ecological farming and strong border protection (OECD, 2022). The Agricultural Law (Bundesgesetz über die Landwirtschaft) creates the central legal basis for food system policy in Switzerland, while the AP is the central policy instrument to structure the specific support and regulations for farmers. This key policy is reformed on a regular 4-year cycle.

Recently, its reform process has been broadened to integrate a more holistic food system perspective, including policy changes at the demand side. First, to resolve existing political deadlock between reformists and agricultural interest groups, the Swiss national parliament demanded a revised report from the Federal Council on the future direction of AP, including a long-term perspective for Swiss agriculture (OECD, 2022; Schweizer Bauernverband, SBV, 2021). This resulted in the publication of the official postulate report on the *Future Direction of Agricultural Policy* (Zukünftige Ausrichtung der Agrarpolitik) by the Federal Council in June 2022.

This report took a more integrated approach moving from a pure agricultural policy to a more holistic food system perspective, including policy changes on the demand side, building, among other things, on the Swiss Nutritional Strategy 2017–2024 and its action plan. The report also fed into the development of the new Swiss Nutritional Strategy 2025–2032. The official report was the first time that the term “agriculture and food policy” was used in an agricultural policy document. Instead of focusing mainly on the agricultural sector, it addressed all actors involved in the food supply chain, from farm to fork, and emphasised its impact on sustainability and environmental issues, as well as the importance of ensuring food security. For instance, it outlined the need to shift demand towards more plant-based diets and to support this transition through action along the supply chain. Potential specific measures being discussed to implement this transition include changes in public procurement and industry agreements (*Branchenvereinbarungen*) with retailers and providers of system gastronomy to promote sustainable diets. An example of the adoption of such an industry agreement is the Swiss agreement on food waste reduction that sets the goal to reduce food waste by 30% by 2030.

In addition, the Klimastrategie Landwirtschaft und Ernährung (Climate Strategy for Agriculture and Food), published in September 2023, built on the postulate report of the AP22+ by the Federal Council, but went a step further. It did so by outlining more detailed measures to attain the objectives to reduce the climate footprint of domestic food consumption by two-thirds (compared to 2020) and the greenhouse gas emissions from domestic food production by 40% (compared to 1990) by 2050. The action plan that accompanies this strategy introduces concrete measures that address the three strategic directions outlined in the strategy: expanding knowledge, strengthening participation and further developing policy for the Swiss food sector (*Bundesamt für Landwirtschaft, BLW, et al., 2023*).

Key food system stakeholders, which often hold opposing views (e.g., farmers' associations, retailers and environmental NGOs), generally supported the official postulate report outlining steps towards an integrated agricultural and food policy as well as the Climate Strategy for Agriculture and Food (Stäheli, 2022; SRE, 2022). While the farmers' association appreciated the distribution of responsibility along the food value chain, environmental organisations applauded the move towards a more integrated food system policy, including demand-side changes. However, scientists and NGOs also pointed out the need to formulate more stringent and specific targets and measures to transform the Swiss food system in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), biodiversity and climate change mitigation targets.

This case study explores the process, stakeholders and governance structures involved in gathering support for the integration of agricultural, food, health and environmental policies, and navigating political tensions around the topic, with key lessons for food system transformation pathways in other countries.

2 Involving experts and citizens to formulate food policy recommendations

2.1 The initiation of Ernährungszukunft Schweiz to formulate a policy transition pathway

To formulate a more specific and comprehensive pathway for transforming the Swiss food system in line with the SDGs and the Swiss Strategy for Sustainable Development 2030, the Swiss branch of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) initiated the project Ernährungszukunft Schweiz (The Future of Food in Switzerland) in 2022. This project was funded and accompanied by different federal offices, as well as various foundations. As part of this project, an independent scientific committee of 42 interdisciplinary food system experts and a citizens' council of randomly selected Swiss citizens were created.

The scientific committee was tasked with assessing how well Switzerland's food system aligns with the SDGs and providing targeted policy recommendations. Meanwhile, the citizens' council, designed to represent a wide range of locations (cities, urban areas, rural areas) and of the Swiss resident population in terms of age, gender and language, discussed ways to align the Swiss food system with the SDGs. As a foundation for their discussions, the citizens' council received inputs from various stakeholders and the scientific committee.

The scientific committee and citizens' council operated independently. The project consortium decided on this dual-lane strategy of setting up an independent scientific committee and a citizens' council with the goal to involve a broad set of actors and foster an evidence-based discussion on holistic food system transformation pathways. The results of the scientific committee as well as the results of the citizens' council were summarised in two separate and independent reports that were handed over to the Federal Council at the first National Food System Summit on 2 February 2023.

2.2 Key take-aways from the scientific committee and citizens' council reports

In its report², the scientific committee highlighted the environmental, social and economic opportunities of food system transformation and outlined 11 specific transformation targets, emphasising the importance of changing diets towards more plant-based food consumption (Fesenfeld et al., 2023). It also showed that the current Swiss food system is not on track to reach various sustainability targets and that the current goals set by the Federal Council for the period until 2050 are insufficient to align with Switzerland's commitment to the SDGs. Moreover, the scientific committee proposed concrete policy targets and a sequence of different policy measures for accelerating the transformation of the Swiss food system in line with the SDGs. This was proposed as a way of resolving existing opposition to food system transformation, illustrated by ongoing tensions during the AP reform process. For the first phase, the experts recommended the creation of a new transformation fund to finance various innovation and compensation measures that create new economic opportunities for more sustainable food supply chains. According to the experts, this fund can also help to

2 The 42 scientists used an iterative Delphi process, involving multiple workshops in compliance with the Chatham House rules, surveys and a peer review process to derive their evidence-based recommendations.

reduce opposition from those actors who will experience disadvantages from the transition, thus fostering a positive political, economic and social feedback dynamic. Based on this feedback logic, the experts outlined that it could become more feasible over time to adopt more far-reaching policy measures (e.g., changes in agricultural subsidies towards more agro-ecological and plant-based food production, regulations, emission pricing) in later phases (Fesenfeld et al., 2022).

In addition to the expert commission's report, an independent citizens' council also published its recommendations for transforming the Swiss food system in 2023. The citizens' council's key messages emphasised the importance of a shift towards seasonal, biodiversity-friendly and locally adapted agriculture, and recommended a sensible reallocation of government subsidies and market incentives (*Bürger:innenrat für Ernährungs-politik*, 2022). Furthermore, the citizens agreed on the importance of food waste reduction and the expansion of plant-based production and consumption. For the latter, they believe that a true cost approach that informs consumers about the external costs of products, combined with interventions to educate and sensitise the public, is a possible way forward. Other key themes of the citizens' council's recommendations are the improvement of the social and economic position of farmers and the role and responsibility of large food corporations.

2.3 The impact of the Ernährungszukunft Schweiz project

The reports produced by the scientific committee and the citizen's council as well as their official submission to the Federal Council have generated a great deal of public attention and discussions around the transformation of the Swiss food system.³ The reports led to multiple official motions in the Swiss national parliament calling on the Federal Council to integrate them in future strategy documents.⁴

The Federal Council's official response to these motions was that the reports would be considered in the drafting process of the AP30+ (Swiss agricultural policy beyond 2030)⁵. Besides their effect on public and political debate, the reports also sparked discussions within the federal administration and a continuous exchange between science and policy. For instance, a close exchange of knowledge and information has taken place between the scientific committee and different federal departments (e.g., the Federal Office for Agriculture, FOAG) as well as stakeholders participating in the accompanying group for the revision of the AP30+. In doing so, the *Ernährungszukunft Schweiz* project has influenced the development of future food policymaking processes and actions of public and private food stakeholders at national and sub-national levels. For instance, the report was cited as a basis in the interim report to the Sustainable Development Strategy 2030 by the Federal Office for Spatial Development (ARE). In particular, the inter- and transdisciplinary nature of the *Ernährungszukunft Schweiz* project and its holistic food system framework nurtured individual and collective agency on the topic. It also fostered a common understanding of barriers and opportunities in the transformation process. For instance, during its research and report writing phase, the scientific committee of *Ernährungszukunft Schweiz* was in close exchange with actors in the official scientific advisory group updating the new Swiss Dietary Guidelines. The revised Swiss Dietary Recommendations, along with an updated Swiss Food Pyramid, were published in September 2024. In line with the dietary recommendations of the scientific committee of *Ernährungszukunft Schweiz*, the revised Swiss nutritional recommendations for the first time include aspects of a planetary health diet. This marks a further step toward a more holistic approach in Swiss food policy by linking human health aspects to the broader sustainability questions of the Swiss food system.

3 See e.g. *Die Ergebnisse zeigen grosses Verständnis für die Landwirtschaft*, 2023; Interview with a political scientist: *Nur noch halb so viel Fleisch, deutlich weniger Eier und Milchprodukte*, 2023; *Schneuwil*, 2023.

4 See e.g. 23.3301 *Empfehlungen für eine nachhaltige Ernährungszukunft*, 2023.

5 Motion 23.3342.

In addition to national efforts, recommendations from both the scientific committee and citizens' council are echoed at cantonal and city levels, where Switzerland's federalist structure enables independent initiatives, such as the canton of Graubünden's and Luzern's climate strategies and agricultural reforms or the city of Zurich's holistic strategy for sustainable nutrition, focusing on food waste reduction and plant-based diets.

3 Conclusions and lessons learned from the Swiss food system transformation pathway

1. Transforming the Swiss food system towards more sustainability remains a very controversial topic in Switzerland. However, recent developments have allowed a new consensus to emerge around the need for future policy to adopt a food system approach and a governance system to enable these changes. The recent developments towards a more integrated food policy have therefore laid the foundations for new actions.
2. The diversity of existing policy strategies and initiatives in the food sector across the federal and sub-national levels in Switzerland represents both a barrier and an opportunity for the transformation process. On the one hand, the greater degree of subnational independence opens up the possibility of a variety of approaches and concrete actions at the cantonal and city level. These can then serve as demonstration projects to illustrate new transformation opportunities to key stakeholders at the national level. On the other hand, the current variety of strategies and policies – also at the national level – creates incoherences. Due to the lack of a comprehensive food system policy strategy, the actions taken along the food supply chain remain uncoordinated and the overarching food system goals are unclear. For instance, the legal basis for the AP (i.e. the Agricultural Law) focuses solely on agriculture, rather than the whole food system, and is therefore a potential barrier to the further development of a more comprehensive food system policy reform.

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Case study #11: United Kingdom

Ben Reynolds (IEEP UK) | February 2025

SUMMARY

Development of national food policy and food strategy

The UK Government published its Food Strategy in 2022 that takes a food system approach. It follows publication of an independent review in 2020 and 2021 that proposed a diagnosis and recommendations on health, inequalities, agriculture and food culture after extensive consultation of experts and citizens. The Government Food Strategy is considered less ambitious and comprehensive than the review. Although it had cross-departmental buy-in, it lacked legislative grounding and a means to assess progress. The Strategy's commitments and actions focus on England while Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have their own policies and strategies. However, the Government Food Strategy introduces a very useful set of indicators on, for example, household food insecurity as part of the Food Security Index. The new UK Government elected in summer 2024, announced in December 2024 its intention to create a new Food Strategy, now in development in 2025.

Focus area 1 – Process of setting up recommendations for a Food Strategy

The development process around the independent review was notable for its breadth and length (over two years) of engagement including a call for evidence, advisory panel, citizen dialogue and meetings with over 350 organisations and bodies. With regard to the process of developing recommendations for the Food Strategy, it stands as a good practice example.

Focus area 2 – Dietary policy addressing obesity

The UK has implemented three Plans Against Childhood Obesity (in 2016, 2018 and 2019) which resulted in: a soft drink levy; restrictions on TV and digital advertising of foods high in salt and/or sugar; restrictions on the promotion of these foods.

Focus area 3 – Regional and local food policy

Around 100 out of 400 local authorities in the UK have developed food policies and/or strategies through a multi-partner and multi-sectoral "food partnership" approach supported by a non-profit network. Although recognised by the Strategy as a point of excellence to learn from, England does not provide direct support to the approach, contrary to Scotland that requires each local area to have a local food partnership since 2022.

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1 Introduction

The UK Government's most recent Food Strategy was released in June 2022. With elements of food (also farming and dietary) policy devolved to Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, whilst its context was UK-wide, the focus of its actions and commitments is on England. The new UK Government, elected in the summer of 2024, announced in December 2024 its intention to create a new English Food Strategy, now in development in 2025, although this is not the focus of this analysis as little detail is available at the time of publication.

One of the crucial distinguishing features of the 2022 Government Food Strategy is that it takes a food systems approach rather than just focusing on promoting food business, or looking at aspects of diet, for example. As such it is in a narrow category of official/UK Government food policy documents that look beyond a single silo, the other examples being the 2008 Food Matters Strategy (not covered here) and more recent devolved national and local Government food strategies (covered briefly below).

This Government Food Strategy was released in response to the National Food Strategy (Dimbleby et al., 2021), which was commissioned by the Government in 2019 as an independent review and was treated as an advisory document that the Government then responded to.

The process of setting up this independent review, including the stakeholder involvement and integrated approach towards the development of policy recommendations was and is widely considered a good practice approach that will be portrayed in this case study. Second, we also look at a mix of policy instruments used to alleviate obesity rates in the UK. Finally, we look at vertical integration – between the national and the local level and the role of food partnerships where local authorities, community groups, businesses, farmers and other groups collaborate to shape local food policies.

2 The process of setting up recommendations for a Food Strategy

2.1 Role of the independent review called The National Food Strategy

The independent review, called The National Food Strategy (NFS) had a semi-independent status, being spearheaded by Henry Dimbleby then a non-executive Director at the UK Government Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and supported by a team of civil servants and seconded experts. It was released in two parts in July 2020 and July 2021. Part One (Dimbleby et al., 2020) acted as context and provided an interim set of recommendations, produced early partly in response to the emerging needs following the coronavirus epidemic and UK lockdown measures, but also to try to inform the debate around food policy in the context of the UK's decision to leave the EU.

The full and final report in July 2021 (Dimbleby et al., 2021) was broader in its approach, reinforcing the recommendations of Part One, whilst the recommendations were deliberately narrow in order to provide a focused and more achievable first set of measures to improve the food system. The 14 recommendations were split into four categories, called:

- “Escape the junk food cycle to protect the NHS [National Health Service].
- Reduce diet-related inequality.

-
- Make the best use of our land.
 - Create a long-term shift in our food culture."

The recommendations all focused on fully costed implementable UK Government policies, which, if fully implemented, would generate more income than expenditure. While the context provided by the bulk of the report has received widespread support across business, NGOs, academics and beyond, the 14 recommendations, although targeted, were criticised by some groups whose issues were not covered. For instance, policies targeting the environmental and climate impact of the food system, particularly on reducing consumption and production of meat and dairy, were not included as recommendations despite being a large focus within the report.

Ahead of its release, the NFS team had gone to great lengths to consult widely with stakeholders across food, farming and related sectors, in government, industry, civil society, academia and beyond, also running citizen assemblies, workshops with young people and prime influential stakeholders from different sectors, including policy makers, to inform its recommendations for publication. This comprehensive analysis and consultation was one element of the work that has gained much reputation, domestically and internationally, as good practice to follow, and marked it out from other policy/strategy processes (Green Alliance 2024, Food Foundation 2024). Much of this work is still available publicly on the [NFS website](#).

2.2 The 2022 Government response and set up of a Government Food Strategy

Shortly after the NFS release in 2021, the Government committed to releasing its own response, which was originally intended to be a White Paper (which would give it some legislative status if it received support in Parliament). However, the Government response was downgraded to a [Policy Paper](#) (with no legislative status), called Government Food Strategy when the resulting response emerged in June 2022.

The Government Food Strategy focused its analysis and commitments around three objectives, which can be summarised as: growing the food and farming industry; ensuring a healthy and sustainable food system; exporting more and importing what consumers want. It chose a different approach to the structure of the independent review.

In comparison to the NFS with over 300 pages and multiple additional documents, the Government Food Strategy was only 33 pages long. While this was partly due to the fact that it heavily referenced the NFS's previous work, the Government's Strategy also included fewer specifics and opted for more voluntary measures. It also deviated with regard to the selection of measures that were recommended, with a larger focus on production-side measures. With regard to policies addressing diets and food procurement, just some of the recommended new measures were taken up as commitments in the strategy, mainly:

- A [Food Data Transparency Partnership](#) – albeit not requiring mandatory reporting which the NFS recommended. The Partnership aims at "improv[ing] the availability, quality and comparability of data in the food supply chain". This has been set up and continues to consult on what data should be measured.
- The production of an annual food security index (Defra 2024a). Unlike many other non-binding commitments in the Food Strategy, this [index](#) is produced every year, with [a report](#) every three years which also notably covers household food security (Defra 2024b).
- A commitment to consult on whether to procure 50% of public sector food from local producers, or to higher environmental standards, which would mark a huge uplift from current average practice. Although the consultation response is still not forthcoming, a parallel independent review commissioned by the

Government (Quince, 2024) released its findings days before the general election period. The new Government has not announced its position on procurement standards.

- The announcement to pilot a "Community Eatwell Programme", that – according to the NFS – would enable general practitioners (GPs) in healthcare to prescribe fruit and vegetables to people suffering, or at risk of suffering, from diet-related illness or food insecurity.¹ The Alexandra Rose charity has piloted this approach, but not as part of a government-backed programme as committed to in the Strategy.
- Up to 5 million British pounds sterling for a suite of measures to improve school food and to build a strong food curriculum.

The Government's Strategy also confirmed to continue a number of existing programmes to improve healthy diets, such as the National School Breakfast Programme (NSBP) for schools in disadvantaged areas and the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme, which provides support to children in receipt of free school meals during holiday periods.

Over the year between the commitment to respond to the NFS and the Government Strategy's release, no public consultation was run (unlike the NFS) and no champion or oversight body was put in place to ensure its implementation (as the NFS recommended). However, the official Government Strategy does, or did originally, have a cross-departmental buy in, rather than just being delivered by one department (i.e. Defra), notably with the Department of Health and Social Care taking a lead on some of the recommendations.

Its brevity and lack of concrete commitments, along with a lack of stakeholder engagement, meant that the end result was widely criticised by NGOs and other groups on release, many of whom saw it as a step backwards from the NFS. With the invasion of Ukraine, the focus of the Government's Food Strategy was re-examined in a Parliamentary briefing and debate (Malik, 2022).

2.3 Announcement of a new Government Food Strategy in 2024

The new UK government, elected in 2024, announced only a few months after gaining power (in December 2024) its intention to create a new English Food Strategy and to work with Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland on a coordinated approach (Grylls, 2024). Whilst the timescales for the new Food Strategy and degree of further consultation on it are not clear, the announcement stressed four priorities, which cover the themes of health, food security, food business and environmental impact. Notably, the Government has also stated its intention to establish an oversight body for the Strategy and has not ruled out legislation if it is needed to drive progress on its priorities. Given that previous strategies (such as the 2008 *Food Matters strategy*) have been shelved with a new Government coming to power, the potential for this to be given a legal framework or status – such as a Food Bill, as recommended in the National Food Strategy – could mark a step change from previous approaches.

The National Food Strategy was referenced heavily in the launch speech and clearly its existence (including the engagement work done in its production) has laid the foundations enabling the Government to move so quickly in announcing its intention to produce its own food strategy.

¹ At the time of writing (March 2025) this has not been implemented.

3 Dietary policy addressing obesity

Nutrition policy lessons can also be drawn from the UK's approach to foods high in sugar, fat or salt. With some of the highest levels of childhood obesity in Europe (and globally), the scale of the crisis has been a catalyst for these policies. The UK's most notable recent policy commitments to dietary health have mostly stemmed from the Childhood Obesity Plans produced in [2016](#), [2018](#) and [2019](#). Notably, these were launched as chapters (i.e. different reports), which allowed for each to focus on a narrow set of measures, whilst allowing scope for future chapters to cover other aspects, or build on earlier commitments if they hadn't gone far enough – a novel approach to Government strategies. Also notable was that these received Prime Ministerial backing, in contrast to the Government Food Strategy which was launched by the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Whilst the Childhood Obesity Plans did not have any legal status, the commitments they made ran in parallel to, or resulted in, regulatory measures including:

- the soft drinks levy (included in the Finance Bill, 2016). Studies have shown a [drop in sugar consumption](#) following this announcement and total sugars sold through soft drinks [fell by 34.3% over 2015–2020](#) (OHID, 2022);
- restrictions on advertising of food high in fat, salt and/or sugar (HFSS). Committed to in 2022 under the Health and Care Act, these restrictions would apply to all TV and digital advertising before 9pm. They were due to be implemented in January 2023 and delayed until October 2025.
- and restrictions on promotions of HFSS food ([Food Promotion and Placement regulations 2021](#)). Whilst location-based restrictions came into force, the elements intended to restrict multibuys were due in October 2023 and subsequently delayed to October 2025.

The delays in restrictions on [advertising](#) and [multibuys](#) were made by then Prime Minister Boris Johnson who came under increasing pressure from Conservative MPs shortly before he resigned. The Government formed after the July 2024 general elections, within days of being appointed, [committed](#) to the implementation of these policies, along with a ban on energy drinks to under-16s.

4 Regional and local food policy

4.1 Local policy and the Sustainable Food Places network

The concept of an integrated approach to food has gained much traction at a local government level. The UK is covered by over 400 local authorities that all have some responsibility for elements of food policy. Historically some have produced food strategies usually covering their own, often limited, responsibilities. In the last 10+ years, a movement has led to almost 100 local areas having a multi-sectoral, or food partnership approach to oversee the delivery, assessment (and refreshing) of a strategy or action plan that takes a whole system approach. Food partnerships work with local authorities as one of many partners, but also community groups, businesses, farmers etc. Whilst these partnerships often don't have a legal structure and vary from location to location, most match local authority boundaries. This local development has been supported by the [Sustainable Food Places](#) network – which is funded largely by trusts and foundations. A notable recent development that may cement this approach further is that in Scotland every local area must now have a partnership/plan by law (Good Food Nation Act, see above), but they don't necessarily receive funding. In contrast, in Wales, many (more) partnerships have received funding, but there is no legislative backing. In England the partnership

approach was recognised in the Government Food Strategy as a point of excellence to learn from (Sonnino, 2023), but neither there nor in Northern Ireland does the approach have significant statutory support.

4.2 Devolved nations

A systems-wide approach to food has arguably gone further within the devolved nations, with Scotland progressing furthest by cementing its ambitions in law.

The Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act in 2022 provides a legislative framework, placing duties on Scottish Ministers, local authorities and health boards to produce their own Good Food Nation Plans to contribute to the national one. In January 2024, the Scottish Government released more information on how the National Good Food Nation Plan would set out the outcomes it wants to achieve on food-related issues, the policies needed and the measures to assess progress. It has also led to the establishment of an oversight body to ensure the Act's implementation. The Act has been well received by many stakeholders and is being implemented. Crucially, the legislative nature of this policy means that it will survive changes in Government and that Government can be held accountable to its implementation.

In Wales a Food (Wales) Bill was proposed by a member of an opposition party in the Senedd (Welsh Government). Whilst it received widespread support and debate, it was ultimately rejected in May 2023. In Northern Ireland a consultation was launched in 2021 for a Food Strategy, which was subsequently published as the Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework in November 2024.

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