

Press Release

More sustainable public meals are possible!

Launch of the toolkit for sustainable public meals and discussion about the future of public meals at the final conference of the StratKIT project.

At the final StratKIT conference on October 13th 2021, the online sustainable public meal toolkit was launched. It supports stakeholders from public procurement and catering with innovative tools to change towards sustainability. In a virtual conference with about 170 participants, experts from food and catering enterprises, the European Commission, the Finnish Ministry of Agriculture, ICLEI and science discussed necessary changes for the new Farm to Fork Strategy as well as practice examples and further results from StratKIT.

On October 13th 2021, the day before the EU's Farm to Fork (F2F) conference started, the sustainable public meal toolkit was officially launched during the final conference of the StratKIT project. Almost 170 participants from 16 countries joined the online event, listened to the presentations, put questions to the panellists, wandered through the virtual poster exhibition and networked in a special virtual room.

Changing practices is difficult – therefore, the new online toolkit for sustainable public meals presents more than 50 tools for public procurers, caterers and policymakers to start the change in their municipality, canteen, and organisation. As Rita Goralska-Walczak (Warsaw University of Life Sciences) puts it: **“The toolkit is very diverse, inspirational and practical and will help overcome barriers with good examples.”** All tools include a step-by-step description for easier implementation. The approaches range from strategy development, training for kitchen professionals, checklists for procurers to mapping organic farmers. It addresses eight main topics: Strategies, Public procurement, Communication and capacity building, Organic food, Food waste, Healthy and plant-based food, Resource efficiency, Working with farmers. All tools are provided in seven languages to increase accessibility. Some of the tools are based on already existing good practice examples from the Baltic Sea Region, others were developed and tested within the StratKIT project. For Aaro Lode (Baltic Restaurants Estonia AS), the toolkit puts more criteria on his company. But, at the same time, **“If we want to keep our company going, we need to look at sustainability.”**

The presented examples and the enthusiasm made Alexandra Nikolakopoulou (European Commission, DG Health and Food Safety) optimistic for the future. She presented the links between the European Commission's F2F strategy and the relevance of green procurement for it. From her point of view, an integrated approach considering all stakeholders is necessary and to create massive demand **“to make sustainable food not a niche product, but the norm”**. For the implementation of the F2F strategy the definition of mandatory

minimum criteria for sustainable public procurement as well as new European framework legislation for a sustainable food system will be key next steps.

The main take-aways from the panel discussion are that:

- It is advisable to have a strategy including realistic targets and a guide for implementation as well as national dialogues as a basis for the regional/national transformation of the food system, as Jaana Husu-Kallio (Finnish Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry) stated.
- Local food (food from short supply chains) is still a legal challenge. But for one, the F2F strategy will need to come up with suitable criteria – also as a consequence of the pandemic and the need for a resilient food system. And for the other, it’s a puzzle that can be solved, e.g. by strategic procurement and market engagement, as Peter Defranceschi (ICLEI) suggests. Strategic procurement links to the goals of national strategies and action plans, e.g. on climate action.
- Increasing organic food in public meals is important, but it needs the right balance between creating demand and enabling the (local) producers to provide for it. So market engagement and an incremental approach motivating the producers to shift their production can be a solution here.
- Plant-based dishes need to become more common – but meat and meat-imitates can still be part of the plates. It is more important to convince the consumers with culinary experiences to decide on sustainable meals than whether they are with or without meat, Emil Andersen (PerfectSeason) is convinced.
- Finally, the panellists agreed that it is important to provide healthy, delicious food in attractive surroundings, and it would be best to already start in kindergarten.

Background

The StratKIT project “*Innovative Strategies for Public Catering: Sustainability Toolkit across the Baltic Sea Region (BSR)*” is funded by the European Regional Development Fund in the Interreg BSR Programme and receives financial support from the Russian Federation. 13 project partners from six countries and hundreds of stakeholders from around the Baltic Sea worked on tools for more sustainable public meals from 2019–2021.

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Links:

- Sustainable public meal toolkit: www.sustainable-public-meal.eu
- [Agenda, presentations and further information](#)
- StratKIT platform: www.stratkit.eu
- European Cities Interest Group Sustainable School Food: <https://procuraplus.org/interest-groups/food/>