

Findings and recommendations

With a special focus on school meals

iPOPY definition of public organic food procurement (POP) for youth

POP for youth includes all activities required to integrate organic produce into food offered – for free, subscription or sale – in public settings to children and young people up to 25 years of age. POP for youth is thus part of activities within schools and other institutions, such as day-care centres, universities, hospitals, and military facilities. Such meal systems are organised and their costs are carried, at least partially, by the public institutions in question, and their food supplies include organic products conforming to EU-regulations on organic production.

Italian pupils in Emilia Romagna are served a traditional pasta dish for lunch.

Increasing organic food consumption through public procurement

The iPOPY research project studied how increased consumption of organic food may be achieved by strategies and instruments linked to public food-serving outlets for young people. iPOPY analysed the following key aspects of public organic food procurement (POP) for youth in Italy, Denmark, Finland, Norway and to some extent in Germany: Policy issues, supply chain organization and the role of certification, users' perceptions and participation in the food system, and the health impacts of organic food implementation. The interdisciplinary research focussed on organic school meals as the most important channel of public food provision for youth, but a music festival, military camps and religious congregations were also studied.

This leaflet, addressing actors at the interface between science and practice, presents the main findings of the project and provides recommendations to specific actors, such as policy makers as well as practitioners and stake holders from the catering sector, administrations and schools or other food serving arenas.



Lessons learnt: Findings of the iPOPY research

Organic school meals are influenced by political decisions, regulations, food culture and other social as well as school related issues. They are shaped by their triple context: mass catering, school systems and school food systems. First, mass catering (for youth) is bound to manifold technological, logistical, financial, legal, hygienic, and other organisational restrictions. Therefore, we regard such catering systems as complex constellations.

Second, the school system (e.g. half-day or full-day school) frames the specific organisation of school meals. In any school meal, even a packed lunch brought from home, many stakeholders are involved, such as producers, processors, caterers, politicians, municipality officials, schoolmasters, teachers and other school staff, pupils and parents.

Hence, the third factor – school food systems – has developed very differently across European countries. The main two types are a complete school meal provided to a majority of pupils (e.g. Italy and Finland) versus single food items (e.g. milk, fruit) offered in addition to, or instead of a lunch box brought from home (e.g. Norway and often in Denmark). Providing *organic* school food is especially demanding because these products may have separate supply chains, premium prices, underdeveloped processing, and restricted availability, while the provision itself has to match certification standards.

Italy has a complete meal service with a warm lunch for the majority of pupils from six to 13 years. It can be seen as a frontrunner of organic school food provision. Striving for high quality school food, Italian regions have implemented ambitious laws and guidelines supporting the use of organic produce. Municipalities have designed sophisticated calls for tenders and supported the establishment of organic supply chains – often on a regional basis. Up to 40 % (by weight) of the food products procured for school meals are organic.

The average costs for a school meal are comparatively high.

Finland has a professional, free (tax financed) school meal service with complete and warm meals for all pupils. With a well running system and trust in conventional and local food the interest in increasing the use of organic food products has been much smaller than e.g. in Italy. However, the national action plan aims at serving organic, vegetable-based or seasonal food once a week in 2010 and at least twice a week by 2015.

In *Denmark*, the tradition has been a lunch box brought from home, but this picture is slowly changing. Due to political activities and public debates on obese youths, school meals are now being offered in several schools and municipalities. Approaches vary from food made at each school to cook-chill-heat systems with simple dishes offered in school tuck shops. The meals are mainly paid for by users, and participation is low. At the same time, organic food is well established in the food market. Private catering companies as well as some municipalities (e.g. Copenhagen) support the use of organic food in school meals.

In *Norway*, the use of organic school food is hampered by the generally restricted public food procurement at schools (only milk and fruit schemes), but the national government has formulated ambitious goals for organic food consumption that may foster increased use of organic school food.

School meal provision in *Germany* is changing from single food items towards complete warm meal service, due to the expansion of full-day schools. The organisation of school meals is patchy because of different regional regulations, but a dynamic development is opening up new possibilities for introducing organic school food. Berlin is a pioneer in this trend, requiring at least 10 % organic produce (by price) in school meals.

In conclusion, public organic food procurement for youth is an emerging field of action that cuts across established policies and responsibilities. Evolving organic school food policies require new responsibilities, capacities, knowledge and funding. Successful implementation of organic school meal systems depends on committed actors from municipalities, catering companies, local politicians, parents and schools. It is feasible, as the Italian example reveals, even though it may take years to change particular meal systems and public spending schemes.

Proud chefs at Værebroskole in Denmark.



Analysis of policies to support organic school meals

Laws and regulations that promote the procurement of quality school food, including organic products, are an effective instrument to support the use of organic products in school meal systems. This



has been demonstrated in many Italian regions.

Policy interventions may be more productive if they are designed to tackle more than one aspect of the problem at a time. Education, contracts, political support, financial means, quality standards, and participation are keywords for the issues involved. A major finding points towards the challenge of embedding organic food simultaneously into the respective institutions that are involved in school meal procurement. Cases from all studied countries display a wide range of (organic) school meal systems, each of them being embedded differently with specific strengths and weaknesses. For example, the institutionalised Finnish system is very efficient in procuring school meals but difficult to change towards including more organic food, whereas the political will in Norway to introduce organic food is not sufficient to transform the entire school meal system.

Supply chains and certification

Carefully designed calls for tenders and negotiated procurement contracts are crucial instruments for municipalities to ensure high quality of specific elements of the school meal system such as the use of organic produce or operation of the meal service itself .

Most producers and caterers still work from their point of view and are embedded in their specific and separate logics. Knowledge about the restrictions and needs of the "other side" is rare. A closer relationship and better integrated supply chains from the producer to the kitchen are needed. Cooperation between stakeholders is a cornerstone of a successful organic school meal system. Round-tables facilitate communication and learning processes between producers, caterers and administrative staff.

Best practice cases from Italian municipalities suggest that there is not *one* optimal system for all organic school meal systems, but rather that each municipality has to find its own solution, adapted to its context.

Certification of organic school meals will contribute toward ensuring and controlling organic quality, and may make the use of organic products visible, if so desired. Whereas detailed EU standards are available for organic production and processing, no such EU standards have been developed yet for organic catering. Thus, various national systems are currently being used in, for example, Germany, Norway, Finland, and Denmark. Common EU standards would be largely welcomed among stakeholders representing the certification sector.



Pupils in Emilia-Romagna, Italy, having school meal with a high share of organic food.

Food education and young peoples' perceptions of organic food

Young people express positive perceptions of organic food in general (e.g. good for health and the environment, often – but not always – better taste), but ambiguities related to increasing their consumption (e.g. high price, limited availability, and questioning taste differences and evidence of organic being healthier and better for the environment).

School meal systems are shaped not only by localities and actors, but also by school food cultures. A school culture is the set of shared

beliefs and priorities driving the thinking and actions at a particular school. Thus, cultural factors need to be considered when planning school meals, food education and learning processes. Specific approaches and solutions are needed because one size does not fit all.

Food education (for sustainable development) will profit from a more practical and experiential approach – using organic production and food as illustrative material.

Organic school food and health

Schools may play an important role in learning and communicating healthy eating strategies in order to prevent children from becoming overweight. Organic supply policies in schools are often linked to general school food and nutrition policies which support each other to achieve healthier food options and eating patterns.



At the large salad buffet at Værebroskole in Denmark, everyone finds something they like.

What can be done?

Recommendations for actors supporting organic school food

Organic food is an important option for making school meal systems more sustainable and should be systematically linked with the broader goal of sustainable nutrition for youth in public settings.

Introducing or increasing organic school food needs to go beyond a simple replacement of conventional by organic items. Embedding organic food in public school meals should strive for a whole school approach comprising, for example, re-organisation of menu planning, linking together food education and curricula, and formulation of new food, health and nutrition policies for schools.

Policy

European and EU policy makers

Different EU activities towards sustainable nutrition such as the organic action plan and the school fruit scheme, should be aligned in order to systematically foster healthy and organic school food. A comprehensive campaign for organic and sustainable school meals could actively combine and promote these initiatives. Such a campaign would need to bring together stakeholders and institutions, support and push actors and highlight the relevance of organic/sustainable school meals.

Due to broad variations of school meal systems across Europe and different approaches towards implementing organic produce, EU-wide regulations or directives on organic school food do not seem appropriate. However, information, advice, and *guidelines* provided through European networks, supporting exchanges, showing best practices and stimulating learning processes may give valuable orientation.

EU regulations on public procurement should be relaxed in order to widen the room for manoeuvre with regard to quality requirements, such as those that may increase the use of local foods, thus allowing for more flexibility towards sustainable and organic procurement.



Norwegian pupils enjoying organic school milk.

Policy

National and regional policy makers

Policy measures and interventions need to be tailored for each specific school meal constellation. However, decision makers and stakeholders should develop and establish standards, guidelines, and standard procedures on organic school food at national and regional level. Stakeholders representing different parts of an organic school meal constellation should participate in this process.

Sufficient financial means are required to establish high quality (organic) school meals systems such as those in Italy and Finland. During transition, extra financial support for organic school meals seems to be justified.

Municipalities and local administrations

Municipalities can develop strategies and launch campaigns to improve the quality of school meals. Such strategies need to promote organic and sustainable school meals as a hot topic, while also formulating goals and providing funding.

Municipalities and others in charge of school food procurement need to establish professional administrative capacities to handle calls for tenders, contracts and cooperation with caterers and producers. Municipal administrations should tap the potential of calls for tenders as an effective steering instrument for organic school meal systems, as Italian examples reveal. Ambitious calls for tenders from and contracts with professional caterers which comply with EU regulations on public procurement should:

- Provide specific requirements for the use of organic and other quality products,
- Strive for a balance between price and quality in the evaluation of bids
- Have precisely formulated quality demands or options, and
- Exclude all requirements that go beyond quality aspects of the meal system or are legally required in any case, such as hygienic standards.

Requirements in calls for tenders should be adapted to the actual possibilities of local and regional supply chain actors and catering companies. Local/regional round-table discussions may facilitate exchange of information, help to develop common targets, foster long-term planning and stimulate learning processes.

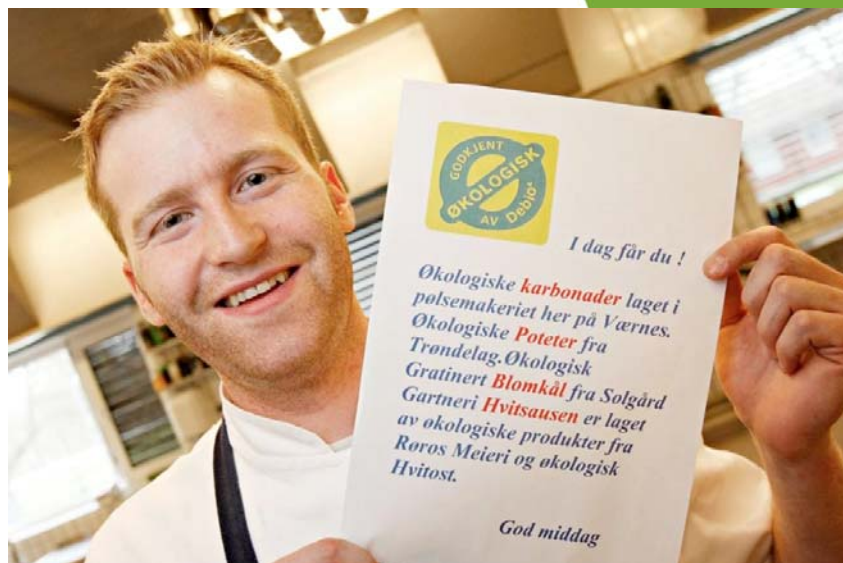


Typical lunch at an Italian school.

Caterers

Caterers should pay attention to school meals not only as part of the food market, but also as educational events and pleasurable occasions. They are part of the school food system and can collaborate with and inform teachers, pupils, students and others about the quality, origin and price of meal ingredients. In accordance with the whole school approach, different functions of school meals need to be planned and provided jointly.

Caterers should think in terms of increasing sustainability and the organic share of their menus. This implies less meat and more vegetables, eating seasonally and choosing organic products when feasible, as well as a focus on personnel qualifications.



Norwegian chef with organic supper menu.

School staff

Organic school food should be embedded in a whole school approach which strives for the coherence of a school's policies and practices, including a participatory and action-oriented approach, a revised curriculum for food education, a carefully designed physical environment and a dedicated food, health and nutrition policy.

Schools should develop a food and nutrition policy, understood as a set of principles, to ensure the availability of healthy foods and impede the availability of unhealthy food choices in the school context.

Including pupils and parents

Actors supporting organic school food should also take into consideration that changes may cause resistance among users. Reactions, both positive and negative, among the user groups and other stakeholders need to be understood and anticipated when planning changes.



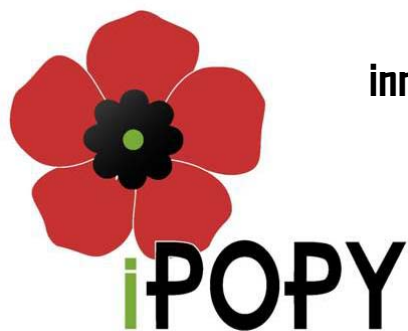
Norwegian pupils with homemade bean burgers.

Especially countries offering single food items, such as Germany, Denmark and Norway, need to create room for complete school meals in school routines.

Food education for sustainable development may be supported by networking activities with other actors within the school food system. Teachers can combine conceptual (scientific), practice based and experiential food education, including outdoor education and growing food on school premises or on a co-operative farm.

The most relevant user groups (pupils, parents, school personnel) should be involved at relevant stages. This will strengthen the embedding of organic food in school meals. Local ownership is crucial. A good example is "Canteen Commissions" in Italy, where caterers, parents, pupils, and teachers, jointly discuss and plan meal quality, menus, etc. Additionally, pupils and students should be actively involved in discussing the sustainability aspects of their school meal system.

Consumers' associations or specific coordination centres for school meals may be commissioned to advocate for high quality school meals with a high share of organic food, such as successful examples in Berlin/Germany.



innovative Public Organic food Procurement for Youth

www.agrsci.dk/ipopy

The iPOPY project

Homepage: www.agrsci.dk/ipopy

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Participating institutes and universities:

- Bioforsk Organic Food and Farming, Norway
- National Institute for Consumer Research, Norway
- Aalborg University, Denmark
- University of Helsinki, Finland
- University of Milano, Italy
- ProBER, Italy
- Technical University of Berlin, Germany
- University of Applied Sciences Münster, Germany

Publications : All of our publications and presentations can be found in the open archive Organic E-prints (www.orgprints.org), search for the keyword iPOPY.

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