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Implementation Guides February 2023

How cities can support access to healthy, sustainable food

[Food](#)[Inclusive and Equitable Climate Action](#)[Spotlight On: Sustainable Consumption](#)Originally Published: **January 2021**Author(s): **C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group, C40 Knowledge Hub**

Food is the biggest source of urban consumption-based emissions, accounting for 13% of C40 member cities' total emissions.¹ At the same time, current urban food systems lead many urban residents to suffer food insecurity and malnutrition, and drive up rates of obesity and other health conditions, as Why cities should support access to healthy, sustainable food for all explains.

Helping residents to eat more healthily and sustainably is a relatively new field for most city governments, but innovation and ambition are already helping to drive better diets and food access in many cities around the world. This article presents ideas and approaches being implemented by cities that have the potential to be adopted elsewhere. How cities can reduce food waste by households and businesses tackles this related issue.

Sign up to international standards and targets on sustainable, healthy food consumption

Cities can begin by adopting these initial priorities and targets:

- Pilot school-feeding programmes that align with a locally relevant Planetary Health Diet, by 2025.
- Implement policies, incentives, taxes and/or bans that halt or prevent the ongoing shift to diets rich in fats, sugars, meat and highly processed food (the ‘nutrition transition’) by 2025.
- Regulate or activate programmes for food businesses to minimise food-related carbon emissions.
- Expand access to affordable, plant-based food by 2025 for all residents.

- Create a food council/board with local stakeholders by 2025.



Cities already implementing such actions or wanting to accelerate a transformation of the urban food system can set the following priorities and targets:

- Align all municipal food procurement with the Planetary Health Diet by 2030, with at least 50% of procurement spending aligned by 2025.
- Support an overall increase in healthy, plant-based food consumption in the city and a shift away from unsustainable, unhealthy diets by 2030.

These are the comprehensive and ambitious targets established for cities that have committed to the [Race to Zero](#), which chime with the [C40 Good Food Cities Declaration](#). Cities can also sign up to the [Milan Urban Food Policy Pact](#), which is comprehensive but does not provide specific targets, and the [WRI Cool Food Pledge](#), aimed at food-serving organisations rather than city governments.

Alongside food-consumption goals, cities can set best-practice targets to [reduce food waste by 50% by 2030](#) and achieve at least a 25% reduction in food loss and waste by 2025.



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Improve the affordability, availability and marketing of healthy, sustainable foods

Cities should take steps to make food that is good for both people and planet the easier, **easier and more desirable option**. Cities can enhance the local food environment to improve access (availability and affordability), prioritising lower-income areas and ‘food deserts’ and ‘food swamps’ (areas where nutritious and sustainable food options are limited, or where there is an abundance of junk food but little access to healthy food options, respectively). Cities can also improve local messaging related to food.

Ideas and approaches already in use include:

- **Provide healthy, sustainable food to people in need through vouchers or pick-up sites and community kitchens.** Prioritising and promoting healthy and sustainable foods will maximise nutritional value for recipients. In New York City, for example, people enrolled on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) can use ‘Health Bucks’ coupons to increase their purchasing power when buying fresh fruit and vegetables. SNAP participants earn USD 2 in Health Bucks for every USD 2 in benefit funding they spend at farmers markets, which they can use to purchase more fresh fruit and vegetables. The City of Buenos Aires, meanwhile, has bolstered its network of more than 470 community kitchens during the COVID-19 crisis, following a 246% increase in demand. How to optimise food assistance for sustainable, food-secure cities looks more closely at this approach.
- **Promote healthy food retail in underserved areas, including by supporting the production of and access to local food.** For example, **Vancouver’s** 2018 updates to the city’s rezoning policy for sustainable large developments includes a clause on the inclusion of sustainable food assets, including community gardens or kitchens, to combat the prevalence of food deserts. **Washington DC’s** Healthy Food Retail Investment Fund supports community-driven food businesses, helping healthy food retailers to open in underserved areas. During the COVID-19 crisis, **Lagos** used closed schools as temporary markets, so people could buy food without having to travel long distances and to avoid large crowds in central markets. Consider adopting a ‘15-minute city’ strategy with a focus on local access to healthy food retail to support this.
- **Restrict the availability of unhealthy foods in priority areas.** Locations prioritised by cities already doing this include schools and hospitals and their surroundings. **Quezon City** is implementing an ordinance prohibiting the sale of junk foods and sugary drinks by shops and canteens within 100 metres of a primary or secondary school (as well as within the schools themselves), requiring them to sell nutritious food instead.
- **Work with restaurants and caterers to improve the quality of meals served.** For example, through Singapore’s Healthier Dining Programme, food and beverage businesses can apply for a Healthier Dining Grant to assist them in developing and promoting healthier, lower-calorie menu options. The Playbook for guiding diners toward plant-rich dishes in food service is a useful resource

for cities' engagement with food retailers.



- **Introduce food-marketing regulations.** Where cities have the power to do so, limit or ban the advertising of junk foods – those foods that are high in fat, sugar and salt, targeting the food itself rather than companies serving them. For example, under the Mayor of London's junk-food advertising ban, food and drinks brands, restaurants, takeaways and delivery services are only able to place adverts on the transport network that promote healthier products. Research led by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine found that the policy contributed to a 1,000 calorie decrease in weekly unhealthy food purchases.²
- **Run 'good food' campaigns, using positive messaging.** Focus on the health benefits of shifting to more nutritious, balanced meals, as well as the environmental and welfare benefits and the boost to the local economy from a shift to more local food. You can read more about the benefits in Why cities should support access to healthy, sustainable food for all. For example, the Mayor of Curitiba launched the Real Food campaign, which has installed posters on urban furniture (such as bus stops) across the city, as well as advertisements on the city's social media outlets, and radio calls inviting people to prioritise fresh produce and avoid processed foods. Campaigns can also support the introduction and acceptance of sustainable municipal food procurement policies, which can face objections from consumers and parents of schoolchildren (particularly where such policies reduce meat consumption).

Los Angeles' Healthy Neighborhood Market Network programme targets underserved areas

In Los Angeles, low-income neighbourhoods and communities of colour have, on average, three times as many small markets than more affluent and white neighbourhoods, but have half as many full-service grocery stores. Limited retail options mean residents in these neighbourhoods have fewer options for a healthy diet. The Healthy Neighborhood Market Network programme supports small business owners in low-income neighbourhoods to bring good food to their communities. The programme works with store and market stall owners, who receive training, guidance and upgrades to their stores, helping them to provide healthy, affordable food.

Mobile food markets can enable faster access to good food

Some cities are incentivizing or implementing the use of mobile food carts or markets on wheels, which can open faster than bricks-and-mortar food outlets. In New York, Green Carts sell raw, fresh produce in neighborhoods that would otherwise have limited access to fresh produce. Toronto's Mobile Good Food

Market is a joint initiative between the city government and non-profits, providing fresh and affordable produce to low-income neighborhoods.

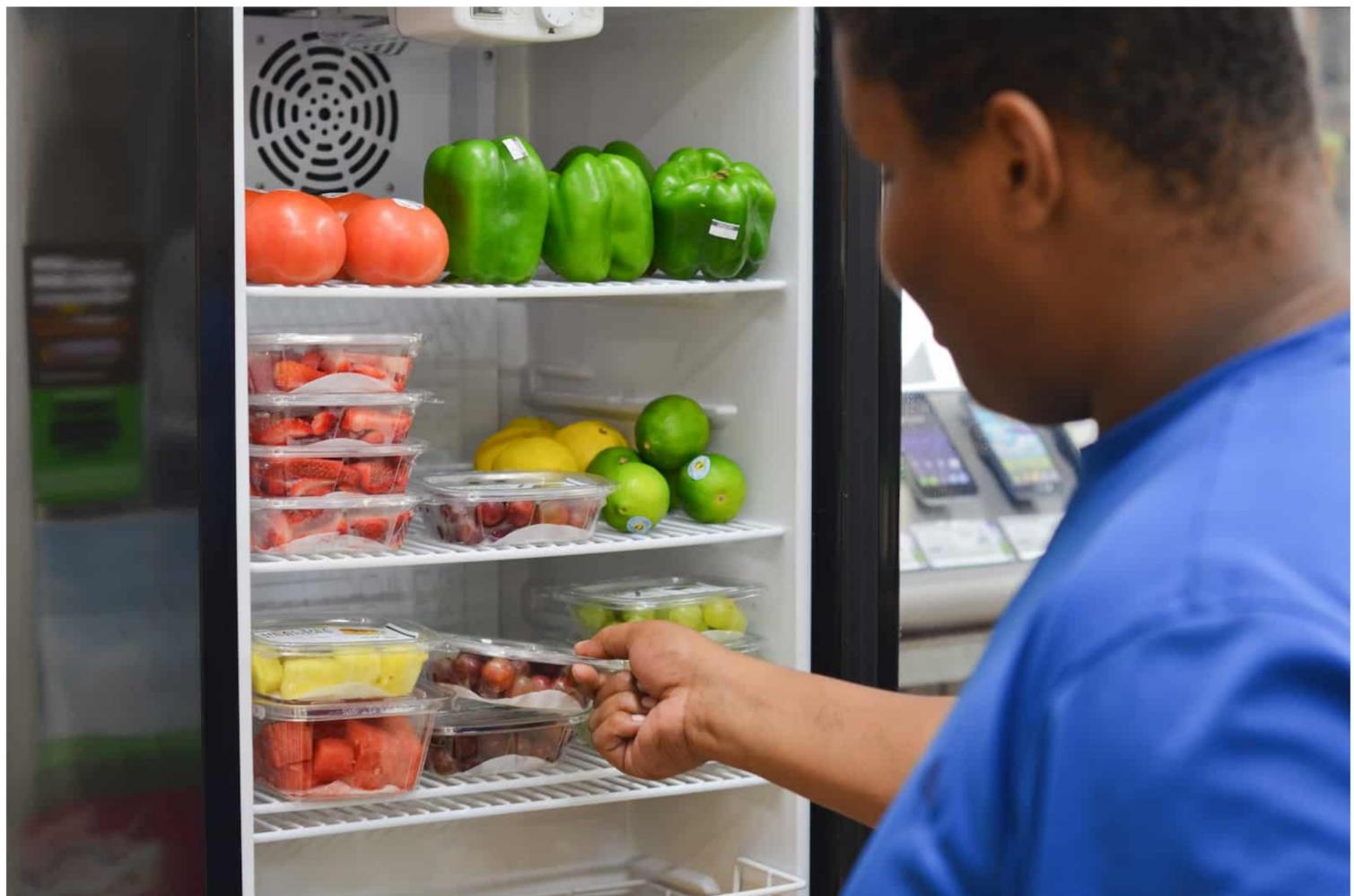


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Align municipal food procurement with the Planetary Health Diet

Cities that have significant control of food-purchasing decisions in institutions such as schools, shelters, prisons, hospitals and government agencies should ensure that the food they purchase and the meals they serve are healthy and sustainable, ideally sourced from organic agriculture.

To this end, cities can introduce or update food procurement policies, guidelines and/or standards on what can be served by city-run kitchens.

These policies, guidelines and regulations should apply to all public-sector food procurement by city-run kitchens, canteens and other restaurants on city-owned properties, as well as catering for government meetings and city-run events. They should also be applied to contracts with providers where cities have the power to do so. Cities can begin by focusing on priority institutions, such as schools, or start with a pilot project as a step towards city-wide policy.

There are three main issues on which policies, guidelines and regulations should focus from a climate

perspective, which are also in line with health-based guidelines:

 English

- Minimising the public procurement of meat (primarily beef).
- Minimising or banning the public procurement of ultra-processed food.
- Maximising the procurement of plant-based food, including protein-rich plant-based foods as alternatives to meat.



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Ideally, these requirements should be legally binding or integrated into existing policy to maximise impact. Examples include New York City's 2019 resolution banning processed meat in public schools and Milan's shift to school menus with less red meat and more plant-based food, which has reduced emissions from food served by 20% in five years. In Germany, Freiburg Municipal Council passed a motion in 2022 requiring schools and nurseries to serve only vegetarian food from the 2023/2024 school year, with the primary goal of saving money.³

Schemes such as 'Meatless Monday' proclamations for city-run kitchens and reward or certificate schemes that incentive and recognise high-achieving institutions can also help to boost ambition in the absence of (and as a step towards) legally binding policy.⁴ The Food for Life scheme in the United Kingdom and the Good Food Purchasing Program in the United States which focus on schools, are good examples.

The Municipal Guide to Climate-Friendly Food Purchasing offers detailed guidance on how to pass and implement a sustainable food procurement policy and/or standards. The Playbook for guiding diners toward plant-rich dishes in food service outlines effective behavioural change strategies that food service providers can use to offer sustainable food options that consumers will want to buy. Signatories to the World Resources Institute's (WRI) Cool Food Pledge can also use its methodology to help set and

An Oslo school districts goes completely vegetarian

Since 2015, the Bydel St. Hanshaugen district of Oslo has changed the way that kitchens work with food in the district's 12 public kindergartens. The facilities now serve 50% organic food, meatless hot dishes and fish. They make their food from scratch, bake their own bread and are working to include the children in the kitchen to teach them about food and the environment. All 12 kindergartens have also reduced food waste. Taking meat off the menu has not only delivered health, environmental and animal welfare benefits, but also offered better value for money, as it has enabled more and better food to be provided for the same money.

Paris's Sustainable Food Plan promotes organic, local and seasonal food

To improve the quality of food and reduce the environmental impact of the 30 million meals served each year in Paris's 1,200 municipal canteens and restaurants, Paris's Sustainable Food Plan 2015-2020 set out a strategy to increase the share of sustainable food in municipal catering by 50% within five years. This meant increasing the share of organic food, of local and seasonal produce and of products certified as sustainable and introducing vegetarian meals to municipal menus.

The Sustainable Food Plan was developed in consultation with town halls and associations and adopted by the Paris Council in 2015. It comes on top of existing food commitments made by the Paris Council, including a requirement that all eggs come from chickens raised outdoors, a ban on palm oil and fish caught in deep waters and a 20% cut in the proportion of meat served in meals.

Cities updating municipal food procurement should work closely with kitchen staff

Transitioning to more sustainable menus involves new ideas and approaches to buying produce, meal planning and cooking. It often means finding new providers and sometimes shifting from pre-prepared or frozen food to freshly cooked food. The buy-in of kitchen staff, including managers, buyers and chefs, and/or catering companies is vital. Cities should engage them in the development of a sustainable food policy, as well as in its implementation. Cities can offer training and guidance to kitchen staff to support this process, as Copenhagen has done (see box).

Copenhagen's city-run menus are now 90% organic – without increasing kitchen budgets

In 2007, Copenhagen City Council decided that all foods purchased by the City of Copenhagen would be 90%

organic by the end of 2015 (compared with 51% in 2007) to improve the quality of public meals. At that time, English, public kitchens relied on bags of frozen and semi-finished products. The city met its goal. The majority of the 900 publicly-run kitchens in Copenhagen are now 90% organic, including nurseries and kindergartens, all of which now have an overall organics ratio of more than 90%. They cook food from scratch as much as possible, menus use more vegetables, less meat and more seasonal produce, and food waste is minimised. These changes have together enabled the organic transition without increasing costs.

To achieve this, the city established the Copenhagen House of Food in 2007, a first-of-its-kind foundation working with professional kitchen staff and municipalities in pursuit of a ‘healthy, happy and sustainable’ food culture. It provides training and education services and encourages new ideas.

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