

Brussels Declaration, November 2024

Joint action by cities, regions, national governments and associations to encourage European legislators to support sustainable food public procurement

If Archimedes once said, "Give me a fixed point and a lever, and I will move the Earth," today we might say, "Give us sustainability criteria and simplified public procurement procedure, and we will transform food systems."

Given the socio-economic, political, and environmental challenges facing European food systems, this joint statement pursues a dual objective. First, it seeks **to encourage European legislators to establish a regulatory framework** that supports sustainable public food procurement. Second, **it aims to serve as a reference point for cities, regions, and European organizations** interested in joining this collective effort to harness public procurement in driving sustainable food systems.

In recent years, **local authorities and among them organic cities and regions across Europe demonstrate that public canteens are a lever** for combating food insecurity, reducing social inequalities, boosting local economies, supporting sustainable agriculture, increasing the proportion of organic products, protecting the environment, and promoting healthier diets. Additionally, public food procurement should incorporate an **educational dimension** to raise awareness about nutrition, sustainability, and food origins, while empowering communities to participate in the sustainable transition. Supported by numerous organizations, these efforts have led to the creation of two European campaigns — the **Buy Better Food campaign** and the **Freeing Public Procurement campaign** — which advocate for the transformative role of public procurement in reshaping food systems.

Recognizing the real potential of public food procurement, witnessing successful practices across Europe, and heeding a growing call for change, these two campaigns share a common vision. **Public funds must be redirected to support sustainable food systems** that provide fair compensation to producers, protect the environment and biodiversity, and promote healthier, more sustainable diets. In line with this shared vision, we present two concrete proposals to transform public food procurement in Europe:

- **Establish minimum sustainability criteria** within a harmonized European framework that empowers local authorities to make more sustainable choices.
- **Simplify procurement procedures** to offer public actors the flexibility to select the most effective procedures to strengthen local short supply chains, contributing to fair, healthy, and sustainable food systems.

To support these proposals, it is essential to pursue a European framework law and the upcoming revision of public procurement directives. This effort should **recognize food as a vital good closely connected to health and the environment, harmonize food-related regulations, and promote multi-level governance** that especially values the role of local authorities and urban-rural partnerships.

