



## Rural-Urban Outlooks: Unlocking Synergies (ROBUST)

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# Rural-Urban Governance Arrangements and Planning Instruments Green Public Procurement for school meals (GPP)

Tukums, Latvia

## 1. Overview

Public food procurement for school meals in Tukums municipality is aimed at providing quality food to regional school children from local producers. The organisation of school meals in Tukums municipality happens as part of trilateral relations between Tukums, a private food service provider and the clients: schools, pupils and parents. At present, the procurement of school meals in Tukums is organised in a centralised manner. The municipality has contracted a private company to provide school meals for 20 schools and kindergartens in the region, both in urban and rural areas. Several Green Public Procurement (GPP) criteria have been included in the call to favour local producers and environmentally-friendly food practices along the food chain. Schools and parents are involved informally in the quality control of the food provision service.

Public food procurement for school meals is part of Tukums Food Strategy 2015-2020, which was adopted in 2015. It aims to develop a sustainable food system in the region that supports the local economy, health and environmental quality. A more general context for public food procurement for school meals is the 2014 introduction of Green Public Procurement (GPP) in Latvia, and the adoption of the regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers "On the application of environmental criteria and proposal selection criteria in procuring food and catering services" the same year, aimed at supporting local producers and the food industry after the Russian trade embargo (Grivins et al. 2016).

## 2. Main Challenges

The key concern of this governance arrangement is to provide high quality, healthy food to school children. In recent years this goal has been coupled with incentives to support local producers who are struggling to access the market and remain competitive against cheaper imported food products (Grivins et al 2016). Creating better conditions for local producers to improve their competitiveness in public food procurement calls is seen as a tool to support local food producers, and to improve the quality of school meals. Sourcing products from local producers would increase the share of local, fresh, organic products in the diets of school children. Public school food procurement, before the green component was introduced,

maintained a disconnection between local producers and consumers. The principal criteria was price, and this was advantageous for intermediaries who used cheap imported products. As a result, a considerable share of the school menu consisted of low-quality food products of unknown origin (Lukševics 2015).

However, a range of problems have been reported in the functioning of the current GPP system in Tukums. First of all, schools have repeatedly indicated that the quality of school meals is declining. Early attempts to fully decentralise school food procurement in Tukums exposed the difficulties that smaller schools had to ensure daily meals of sufficient quality for their pupils. Unable to resolve these challenges at the school level, Tukums municipality bundled all schools together in one procurement, thus centralising the municipal school catering system. As a consequence, the private caterer obtained the power to shape school catering, while other actors were left in a weaker position, struggling to influence the caterers' practices (Grivins et al. forthcoming). The service provider does not respond to criticisms, and Tukums municipality lacks the means to control the service provider and to impose new quality measures. Therefore, Tukums municipality is considering improvements to the management of school meals via a collaborative platform with representatives of all relevant stakeholders (schools, pupils and their parents, local producers, health specialists, the municipality). The platform is to be a kind of local food council that could strengthen regional cooperation among food, education and health actors, and lead to better quality (local) food in school canteens.

### 3. Main Insights

#### 3.1. Insights related to the broad area of “network governance”

As described above, three groups of actors are directly involved in the organisation and supervision of school meals: the municipality, the private service provider and regional schools. Their participation and collaboration is necessary for an effective implementation of GPP in relation to school meals. Once the private service provider is selected, trilateral meetings are organised to discuss responsibilities, communication and other issues relevant for smooth service delivery. School children and their parents are informally involved in monitoring the quality of the catering service. They report quality issues to the school and municipal authorities.

In addition, technical training, exchange of experiences and demonstrations of healthy cooking practices are provided to school cooks to support their professional development and capacity to manage work in canteens according to GPP principles. A range of activities encourage and support local food producers to provide supplies to school canteens. For instance, meetings are organised between the service provider and local processors to select food products for school meals.

A broader range of stakeholders has been involved in the development of Tukums food strategy in relation to public food procurement for schools. Regional and local parish authorities, public institutions, consumers, food businesses, education, research and health

organisations, agricultural advisors and media representatives have participated in consultations and discussions (Tukuma novada pārtikas stratēģija 2015-2020).

### 3.2. Insights related to mechanisms of cross-sectoral coordination and cooperation

Green public food procurement for school meals in Tukums aims for a better integration of education, food (from production to consumption and waste management), health, and environmental sectors in the region. The public food procurement procedure is integrated in the regional food strategy, which was developed in multi-actor consultation with relevant stakeholders from all the sectors mentioned above. Green public food procurement for school meals includes a range of measures aimed at reducing environmental impact in the entire food chain. For instance, public procurement prioritises local, seasonal, organic and integrated products, environmentally friendly packaging and kitchen equipment, food waste reduction, etc. By providing advantages to local products, the GPP also aims to support local producers by improving their market access. Increasing the share of fresh, seasonal and locally-sourced products in school meals is seen as beneficial for consumers' health.

One of the priorities of the food strategy, and a key issue in regional food discussions, is informing and educating cooks, school children and their parents about healthy diets. Green food procurement is coupled with other initiatives aimed at improving consumption habits and health. For instance, Tukums council is implementing a project "Improving access to health services and disease prevention services, in particular among residents from the risk groups of territorial and social exclusion, and poverty". The project involves a range of activities for school children that are aimed at educating them about healthy eating and changing their eating habits. Tukums schools are provided with milk and fruit as part of EU-funded programmes "School milk" and "School fruit", which are also aimed at promoting good nutrition and healthy diets.

However, achieving the goals set for school meals requires actors to rethink the level of centralisation of school food provision, and the relationship between the caterer and local municipalities involved in assisting schools in their attempts to introduce new catering models.

### 3.3. Insights related to the role of (actual, potential) social, organizational, institutional innovations

It is expected that GPP for school meals will improve cooperation among local producers, in particular among small and medium ones. To participate in calls, suppliers need to meet quantity and quality criteria (volume, diversity, seasonality, regularity) which are difficult to meet for individual small and medium-sized farmers.

As noted above, Tukums municipality is considering the introduction of a collaborative platform with the participation of representatives of all the relevant stakeholders (schools,

pupils and their parents, local producers, health specialists, the municipality). This platform is intended to improve regional cooperation between food, education and health actors, and to lead to better quality (local) food in school canteens.

#### 4. Effectiveness Indicators

The principal beneficiaries of the green public food procurement are school children. In total, 3,821 children from 20 regional schools and kindergartens are receiving better quality meals prepared from fresh and seasonal products. Observations made at the schools indicate that pupil's knowledge about healthy consumption has improved and their food consumption habits are changing as they are pay more attention to how healthy the food they consume actually is.

Regional stakeholders have been made aware of the importance of a well-balanced diet and the role of sourcing local food products to ensuring better quality meals. Preparation of the GPP involved gaining an understanding of the existing situation in school catering and a detailed description of school meals.

According to Tukums municipality, they still lack mechanisms to monitor the quality of service provision, and to intervene if necessary. Similarly, Grivins et al. (2016) conclude that school meal caterers in public procurement are not subject to monitoring procedures: “They are state-protected, safeguarded by the outcomes of the public procurement tender and the intricacies of procedures”. Although the tender requires quite specific products and procedures to be used in providing school meals, and there are controlling bodies to supervise service delivery, monitoring seems to be limited in practice. As a result, fraud is possible, and the aim of GPP for school meals (i.e. ensuring quality food for school children from local producers) is undermined.

While formal control mechanisms appear to be insufficient, informal bottom-up control of meal quality by the schools themselves can be effective if school food is among the priorities of the school administrations and parent organisations (Grivins et al. 2016). Feedback from pupils on their satisfaction with school meals, followed by tests in which parents also taste the food, are ways of determining the effectiveness of GPP.

Some criticisms are focused on the centralised organisation of food procurement. While centralisation facilitates a smooth process to organise school meals all across the region, it can be an obstacle for individual local farmers (Tukuma novada pārtikas stratēģija 2015-2020). Local producers see the following main challenges for participating in public procurement calls: (1) the price and their poor competitiveness in the face of intermediaries offering cheaper food products, (2) the need to ensure a high variety of products, (3) lack of information about public procurement, (4) the quantities requested are too big, (5) regular supplies and (6) the seasonality of products (Korpa et al 2015). Tukums municipality has made efforts to engage local producers, but communication and attempts to motivate them have not been successful; therefore, preference has been given to a single enterprise that provides all the catering services (Grivins et al 2016).

## 5. Illustration and further information

Korpa et al (2015) have used the multiplicative method to evaluate the potential economic impacts of public food procurement from local producers in Tukums region. The authors relate the principal benefits of local sourcing to the increased turnover of money in the local economy (income tax, expenditure of revenues in the region) as well as to the development of food businesses and creation of new employment opportunities in the food sector.

Grivins et al (2015) analyse challenges related to the implementation of GPP in organising school meals. They argue that the implementation of GPP at the regional/local level is influenced by trade-offs based on the capacity of municipal representatives to engage with local producers and/or catering companies, differences in available municipal funding, and historical local practices of food provision. According to them, in the current poor monitoring and control system of GPP for school meals, too much is left to the activism of parents, school administrators, catering companies, local farmers and their organisations.

## 6. References

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