

# Cities for Food Systems Innovation and Green Jobs

## FOOD 2030 WORKSHOP OUTCOMES BRIEF



Those participating in food systems are also the largest group of natural resource managers in the world — and food systems are inextricably connected to nutrition, climate and environment, the circular economy and empowerment, as well as with the broadest range of sectors, industries and jobs.

This Workshop Outcomes Brief, based on the knowledge shared at a [FOOD 2030 workshop](#) held at an official partner event of EU Green Week (31 May 2017) presents some examples and recommendations intended to support uptake of a ‘systemic’ approach to food, especially with regard to future research and innovation opportunities. It focuses on the wider [FOOD 2030](#) aim of engaging and mobilising cities to foster improved cooperation and openness amongst multiple food system actors.



#Food2030EU

Research and  
Innovation

### Overview

- Innovative food strategies in cities tend to use citizen involvement and social innovation as key tools.
- Public procurement approaches are possible with commitment and engagement.
- Food systems approaches including social goals can create green jobs.
- Food sharing can be facilitated by digital innovation.
- Evidence-based tools provide opportunities to redesign food systems inclusively.
- Go beyond city strategies: set innovative operational goals.

## Background

Food systems are not just about the provision of sufficient quantities of food, but also about sufficient quality of food and diets; ensuring they are nutritious, healthy and sustainable for all.

A 'perfect storm' has been brewing: approximately 795 million people — one in nine of the global population — suffer from malnutrition, while nearly two billion people worldwide are overweight or obese, and 1.3 billion tonnes of food are lost or wasted each year (one third of the total food produced for human consumption).

Long distances from producers to consumers mean that many areas are dependent on food imports ('long value chains'), meaning more carbon is being emitted, and nutrient value may be lost in transporting food.

Decisions to improve food systems need to span conventional divides between consumers and producers and between different sectors. They also need to involve knowledge from multiple research disciplines and from citizens, communities, farmers, businesses, city planners and government workers.

Since they house the greatest concentrations of people, **cities and their surrounding regions are crucial entities in the transformation of our food systems.**



From a research and innovation (R&I) perspective, it is really a question of how — and what — to prioritise, and what risks to take and when. There is an ongoing need to understand what is working, and the barriers and opportunities for holistic and inclusive approaches to food systems change.

## Improving food systems via research and innovation

### Innovative food strategies use citizen involvement and social innovation

The [EC Food in Cities project](#), which has been mapping innovative urban food strategies in cities, found that 28.9% of cities studied had a comprehensive food strategy, policy or plan, and that 5.3% had no strategy/policy or plan at all. They found that, often, plans sat within only one government department.

The main tool used to effect the strategies studied was **citizen involvement and social innovation** – and **public procurement seems to play a bigger part than regulatory innovation or financing instruments.**

Some trends they found were:

1. Community buy-in.
2. Enhancing participation.
3. Local empowerment as a policy goal.
4. Shortening food supply chains.
5. Systems thinking.
6. Trans-localism (a need to know what other cities are doing).

### Public procurement approaches are possible with commitment and engagement

Experiences from Copenhagen show that it takes a committed effort to achieve goals of food-systems change and to engage. Political commitment and an inclusive process are two key ingredients also emphasised by a recent [IPES Food Panel Report](#).

To create a public call for tender that worked, the Copenhagen public procurement team engaged all layers of the supply chain (for example, staff in

kitchens, producers and suppliers). The team's jobs changed, becoming more outgoing and less desk-based. Extensive consultation aimed to see how the change in public contract would affect people, and to see if the market could meet the new demands being asked of it by the public contract.

There is perhaps a lack of awareness about green criteria or goals (for example, the [SDGs](#)) or the



guidelines available (for example, the [EU Green Public Procurement Guidelines](#), [Buying Green!](#)) — even among public procurement officials.

Progress against larger goals (for example, 100% organic public procurement) can be made by making many

small changes at many levels. It is also beneficial to provide some benefits for engaging, for example, by giving suppliers who are making small changes a chance to get a contract with the municipality.

## Food systems approaches including social goals can create green jobs

The [Milan Urban Food Policy Pact](#) provides a starting point for municipalities to create coherent territorial food policies. It is explicit that **food systems need to be not only sustainable and resilient, but also equitable**, and that good policies are closely related to many other urban challenges and policies, including poverty and social protection.

The city of Venice, an MUFPP signatory, has recorded 40 agri-food-related projects in 4 years, many with a strong social orientation — these include work with local traders

to ensure that healthy and affordable snacks are available for school children, building citizen awareness on issues of water quality and reuse of bottles, and creating local, sustainable economy pacts between social cooperatives, farmers and sustainability actors.

The experience in Venice showed that the implementation of food systems projects, especially with a social dimension, can encourage the formation of green jobs — for example, employing people in farmers markets.

## Food sharing can be facilitated by digital innovation

The project [Sharecity](#) has built a database of food-sharing activities by more than 4000 enterprises across 100 cities in 43 countries in 6 continents.

More than 70% of organisations studied share more than one thing — produce, opportunities, meals, knowledge (e.g. [King's Cross Skip Garden](#), London, UK, which shares, knowledge, skills and food). Also, most enterprises are at the lower complexity end of the ICT spectrum — although 86% of cities studied had at least one app.

[Savingfood.eu](#) moved an effective offline model onto a digital platform to match surplus food with those who need it. The platform is also a public space for information about food waste and food savings, and a place to arrange the three main types of food-saving activities: rescuing usable food from compost or landfill; gleaning (collecting unharvested food from the field); collecting produce left over from farmers markets. Badges, pledges, personal food reports and crowdsourcing will be used to assess behaviour and encourage pro-social behaviours.

## Evidence-based tools provide opportunities to redesign food systems inclusively

Allying an ecological footprint approach with impact assessment, the Metropolitan footprint tool projects the land needed for actual food consumption, allowing supply to be compared with demand at a local, or city, level.

It allows cities to make informed decisions about where they want to develop food supply, develop biomass resources, or develop greater self-reliance in a particular type of food resource.

Reducing 'foodmetres' implies changing food exports to concentrate on distinctive regional products with unique selling points, and less on large-scale production of singular crops for remote consumers.

[FOODMETRES](#) used the spatial evidence generated by the project as a conversation starter to engage potato farmers in the Rotterdam area; the community of farmers were interested in forging stronger links with the city, and becoming more visible to local populations.

Such tools may also enable cities to take better stock of the density, and accessibility, of green jobs.



## Go beyond city strategies: set innovative *operational* goals

It is often not enough to set up a city-wide policy or strategy without also taking steps to enable implementation. Food policy in the city of Ghent, based in the climate department, has been operationalised under five strategic goals:

1. **A shorter, more visible food chain**
2. **More sustainable food production and consumption**

### 3. **More social added value for food initiatives**

### 4. **Reducing food waste**

### 5. **Optimum reuse of food waste as raw materials**

The municipality also runs an online platform, hosting a facility for questions, networking and exchange on more sustainable production and consumption.

## Key R&I options for advancement of food-systems innovation

- **Build a better flow of information and research evidence** (break down the dichotomies) between urban and rural areas and activities.
- **Find ways to overcome the multi-faceted (yet siloed) nature of food issues** in governance: by creating food working groups, public procurement groups; via food policy owned across several departments; by institutionalising policies that transcend election cycles; via ad-hoc departments or offices; via food committees formed from multiple cities in a region; and via long-term political commitment to change. The R&I system in Europe can encourage crucial cross-linkages and common ground between sectors, for e.g. agriculture, fisheries, aquaculture, land managers, retailers and researchers.
- **Don't get weighed down with complexity** (e.g. 'cross-sectoral', 'transdisciplinary', 'quintuple helix'). Most important is to **start talking and keep talking to people**, especially using evidence-based conversation starters and stakeholder engagement techniques. Governance jobs may even have to change, and become more outward-looking and engagement-focused.
- **Having multiple aims is fine** — for example, involving food saving, poverty alleviation and skills share. In fact, **meeting several criteria at once** seemed to be a feature of several more 'systemic' initiatives that were operationalising or had achieved uptake. Europe's R&I system has an important role to play in promoting joined-up, multi- or transdisciplinary approaches.
- **Know there are tools already available** — for example, spatial approaches, GPP rules, etc.
- **Facilitate networking between cities to share knowledge and experience on developing innovative strategies**; there are good examples already in practice, including outside of Europe — for example, Toronto, Quito, Mexico and Melbourne.
- **Build the evidence base** — on food production and supply, barriers to change, food dynamics within cities, how best to distribute support to cities and regions.
- **Regarding innovative platforms and social enterprises** that create opportunities for peer-to-peer interactions, **research needs to be carried out dynamically**. There are several enterprises already available or being developed, and in use.
- **In creating 'online bridges' between citizens, organisations and stakeholders**, digital technologies may form the basis for some elements of future food-sharing systems.
- **In encouraging the participation of and information to the public** on matters of food and nutrition security — and encouraging a socially distributed knowledge and innovation system — R&I systems can be a key enabler.
- **Keep thinking long-term**: R&I investments are well positioned to emphasise long-term, circular solutions for food and nutrition security — both in terms of radical innovation and scaling up solutions that already exist.

Future-proofed food systems:  
sustainable, resilient, responsible, diverse, competitive and inclusive by 2030

### About this Workshop Outcomes Brief:

This Workshop Outcomes Brief is based on the records from a workshop, Cities for Food Systems Innovation and Green Jobs, (31st May 2017, EU Green Week 2017 official side event), hosted by the FOOD 2030 team of the Bioeconomy group in DG Research and Innovation, which provided an opportunity to explore the role of cities in future-proofing the food system. For more information, see the longer FOOD 2030 Workshop Outcomes Report, *Steps towards food-systems approaches for 2030*, available at <http://ec.europa.eu/research/bioeconomy/index.cfm?pg=policy&lib=food2030>

Written and prepared by Ruth Larbey, Science Communication Unit. This Brief does not necessarily reflect the position of the European Commission, and the European Commission is not liable for any use made of the information contained therein.

