

Sustainable food procurement for schools in Rome

MUNICIPALITY OF ROME, ITALY

Procurement objectives

The objective behind Rome's approach is to support organic agriculture and organic food chains, ensure food safety and nutritional balance, and encourage good environmental performance of current and potential suppliers, through its school meal service.

Since 2001, Rome has employed an incremental approach to designing its food and catering tenders and its food service, to gradually make these more sustainable and innovative. The most recent call for tender for the school food service covers the period September 2007 – June 2012 and has a base value of approximately €355 million.

Background

One million organic meals are served in Italian schools annually - a quarter of the total number of school meals (source: Italian Association of Organic Farming).

In Rome, the All for Quality food programme has been in place since 2001. In January 2010, Rome's Council adopted a decision on GPP for food and canteens. More than 144,000 meals are served daily across 550 nurseries, primary and secondary schools. 92% of the meals are prepared on site with 69% of them including organic food. A vast number of nutritionists and dieticians advise and monitor the service, which also counts on the involvement of canteen commissions comprised of parents and school canteen staff.



Criteria used

The latest tender published for Rome's school catering service (covering preparation, cooking, serving meals, cleaning and waste separation) included the following sustainability and quality criteria:

Technical specifications:

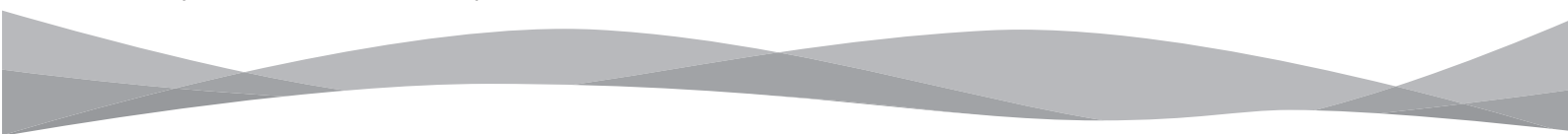
Non-food minimum criteria:

- Non-food and food waste to be separated for collection
- Detergents and sanitisers with a low environmental impact to be used
- Single use material (e.g. napkins) must be biodegradable and recyclable; use of ceramic plates and tableware, glass, and stainless steel for cutlery

Food minimum criteria:

- Food stemming from organic agriculture according to [Regulation \(EC\) No 834/2007](#) for bread, legumes, cereals, olive oil, pasta and rice, cheese, fruit and vegetables, for example
- Ban on the inclusion of genetically modified food for the catering service or for animal feed
- "Guaranteed freshness" criterion for fruit and vegetables (e.g. chard, endives, celery, basil, green salad, strawberries and cherries) with no more than three days between harvest and intake. Products are required to be marked with information provided about the harvesting firm, harvesting date and the site of the food processing centre
- Meat freshness: Red and white meats delivered in vacuum sealed packs within four days of packaging. Introduction of 'protected denomination of origin' or 'protected geographical indication' products for meat (beef, pork, lamb, cold meats and some cheese) in accordance with [Council Regulation \(EC\) No 510/2006 of 20 March 2006](#)
- Seasonality based on Rome's seasons, which are used as a basis for designing recipes and menu planning. Winter and summer menus are designed based on nine-week cycles using 160 different recipes. Meat is served twice a week (maximum) to further reduce the environmental impacts of the food service

The basis price is calculated at €5.28 per meal.



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Award criteria

Contracts were awarded on the basis of the most economically advantageous tender, whereby points were allocated according to the following:

- Economic offer (price of the meal): 51 points
- Technical offer (adaptation and improvement of kitchens and canteens, staff training, provision of products from social cooperatives, working to preserve “freshness guaranteed” criterion, etc): 49 points

Food produced according to fair trade principles (as defined by the [European Parliament Resolution on Fair Trade and Development A6-0207/2006 approved July 6, 2006](#)) such as bananas, chocolate and biscuits also form part of Rome’s menus.

The framework of the contract divides Rome’s municipal territory into 11 lots to encourage SMEs to tender.

Results

Organic food accounts for 69% of all food served in schools, except meat, fish and cold cuts. The switch to organic has raised the average cost of a meal by 8% (that is €0.40). Rome’s approach has improved the market in terms of sustainability and quality. Companies are now aware that they face a public administration which requires strict compliance with all the requirements specified in tenders – they therefore take the bidding process very seriously and are encouraged to improve their own performance. Suppliers were able to meet the criteria and standards in the tendering process. The evaluation of bids was complex and support was needed from expert members of staff, but eventually achieved good results.

Environmental impacts

The impacts of industrial farming and food production are highlighted and recognised as having a massive environmental impact in the EU (EIPRO study, 2006), where this area of consumption is considered responsible for 20-30% of the various environmental impacts of total consumption, and in the case of eutrophication for more than 50%. Within this area of consumption, meat and meat products (including meat, poultry, sausages or similar) have the greatest environmental impact (4-12% contribution to global warming), followed by dairy products.

According to [information about the life-cycle analysis of different types of meat](#), Rome estimates that 1kg of meat served in their schools accounts for 14kg of CO₂ equivalents. Based on the amount of meat served in Roman schools (maximum of twice a week), savings of approximately 8,887 tonnes of CO₂ equivalents are achieved in an annual school year. Savings in water consumption associated with the reduced consumption of meat are estimated at 5,783 m³ annually. Plastic plates and other serving utensils were previously used to serve meals. These are now replaced with earthenware and other reusable material, resulting in savings estimated at 1,800 tonnes of plastic over an annual school year.

Lessons learned

In terms of monitoring, municipal dieticians carry out quality checks of the food on a daily basis to ensure that the terms of the contract are continuously respected. Moreover, another contract was made for monitoring in schools and has been awarded to two private laboratories which analyse some 15 samples of food and foodstuffs on a daily basis. Extending the school food practice to other public canteens (e.g. prisons, hospitals) in Rome is under consideration. The principles on which the latest contract is based will remain the same for future contracts.