

Preparation and delivery of healthy and sustainable school meals

City of Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve (Belgium)

Background

The [City of Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve](#) (OLLN) is a city of around 30,000 people located in the Walloon region of Belgium. It provides 700 meals per day to nine schools in its territory. Since 2010, the City has been implementing a procurement policy focused on offering children quality food, which is seasonal, environmentally friendly and healthy.

At the core of this ambition is the belief that healthy eating should be accessible to everyone, and that sustainable eating habits should be introduced to a growing generation of school children.

Procurement objectives

The current contract for catering services of sustainable school meals in OLLN runs from September 2018 to August 2022. Its objectives include: increasing the awareness and interest in healthy and sustainable food among children (as well as parents and school staff); training people far from employment; and, motivating the market to provide more sustainable food by using the city's purchasing power as leverage. In addition, this procurement has been accompanied by an active approach to reducing food waste, through educating children, monitoring of food waste, and the provision of feedback to the supplier.

Market engagement with possible providers was carried out ahead of the Call for Tender being issued. This allowed the City to define specifications which would challenge the market while still being achievable, and which would require the supplier to continuously improve.

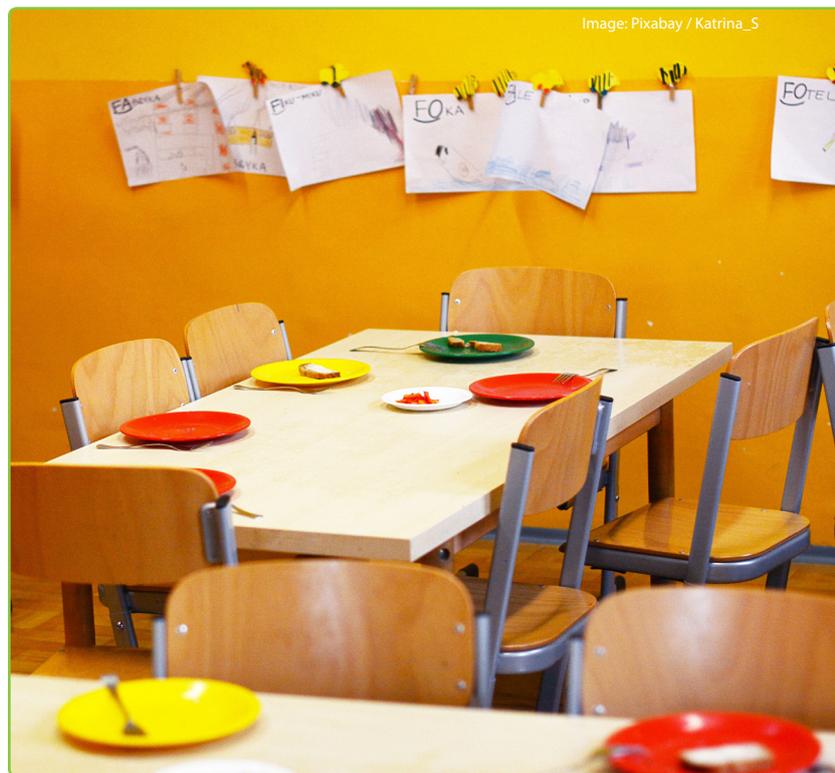
An analysis of user needs was also conducted by an independent external dietician, and parents were consulted about proposals to increase the frequency of vegetarian meals from one to two meals per week (to which 80% responded favourably).

Criteria used

Subject matter of the contract:

Preparation and delivery of meals as part of a sustainable food approach in municipal schools.

The City defined sustainable food to be in line with sustainable development, defined as "development that meets the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs" (Brundtland report, 1987).



Selection criteria:

Tenderers were required to have an Environmental Management System (EMS) for catering services ([EMAS](#), [ISO 14001](#) or equivalent). Tenderers were also required to have an environmental policy relating to catering operations or work procedures ensuring an environmentally friendly service method, and previous experience in applying environmental management measures in similar contracts.

Technical specifications:

The technical specifications focused on sustainable development, with a range of requirements for all food groups, such as, providing a minimum percentage of organic products, seasonal use of fish from Marine Stewardship Council ([MSC](#)) certified sustainable fisheries or aquaculture, and fair trade certification (like the [Max Havelaar](#) label, or equivalent) for food produced in tropical countries.

Organic food: the percentage of organic labelled foods required will be increased each year. In the first year, 15% of the total financial value of purchases of ingredients must be from organic farming; in the second year 17.5%, and by the third and fourth year 20%. In addition, higher organic produce requirements were also set for specific food groups. For example 50% of bread and 100% of eggs were required to be organic in the first year.

Seasonality: OLLN also wished to ensure menus incorporated a high percentage of produce which is in season in the place where it was consumed. As well as the fact that seasonal food often offers better economic value, it is also thought to help meet certain seasonal nutritional requirements. To assist suppliers with menu planning, they are referred to the [Walloon Produce Calendar](#). The requirements for seasonal vegetables are as follows: September to November (80%); December (75%); January (50%); February and March (25%); April (15%); May (25%); and finally, June (40%).

Staff training: provision of staff training and children's taste education for all staff involved in the preparation of food was included as technical specifications. In addition, the successful tenderer is obliged to provide - in accordance with Wallonia's 'social clause', as set out in Article 87 of Wallonia's [Law of 17 June 2016 on public procurement](#) - a minimum of 500 hours of 'social clause internships' to people who are 'far from employment' (that is, young people, people aged over 55, low-skilled job seekers, or any other far from employment target audiences) each year.

Packaging waste: the successful tenderer was required to favour the most environmentally friendly packaging, and whenever possible, should give priority to products packaged in large volume and in returnable packaging. They are also required to sort waste, into glass, cardboard/paper, plastic packaging, organic waste, and household chemical waste (such as frying fat and detergent containers). In addition, fresh tap water should be made available to children in sufficient quantities, and no bottled beverages will be served, in order to avoid packaging.

Food waste: Monitoring food waste in the schools was also prescribed as a technical specification. This focused on food left on the plates and food leftover from the catering service. Monitoring of food waste is done by weighing it on a daily basis. This data is recorded and is provided to the Meals Commission for analysis and adjustment of future menus to avoid further wastage. The Commission (established in 2010) meets once every six weeks and includes representatives of the contracting authority, schools, and the contractor (including management, cook, and dietician). In addition, the Meals Commission also uses this meeting to manage technical problems, develop and organise training and awareness raising actions for municipal staff and/or students.

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Award criteria:

The award criteria were as follows:

- Price (30 points).
- Development of a food plan which incorporates quality, variety, seasonality, palatability and balance of meals, frequency and the weights of food (20 points).
- Guarantees of quality, freshness and continuity in the origin of food (20 points).
- The measures taken in terms of impact on the environment, health and support staff (10 points).
- Performance in terms of socio-professional integration of people far from employment (10 points).
- Suggestions and implications for the planning and organisation of school restaurants, kitchens and service (5 points).
- Proposals for awareness raising and education in sustainable food and taste (5 points).

For the assessment of the quality, freshness and origin of food, the tenderer was asked to provide: a detailed list of products offered by their suppliers, specifying the supply chain for the main foods used in the preparation of the menus; a file containing recent evidence of 'traceability', labels and other attestations from suppliers; and a note describing the internal procedures to ensure the respect of nutrients through cooking methods.

Contract performance clauses:

The winning supplier commits to ensure the continuous training of staff in sustainable food and balanced nutrition, including cooking methods. This training should include at least eight hours per year per person involved in cooking and preparing food.

Within three months of awarding the contract, the successful tenderer must also submit a balanced nutrition training plan, including cooking methods. Menus should be created monthly, and submitted for the approval of the City and/or any other persons it designates as responsible for approving the menu. Menus should take into account the dietary requirements of the children they are providing for. The City is also allowed to visit the kitchens at any time, in order to check they are functioning correctly, that meals are being delivered within deadlines, and that hygiene and cleanliness standards are being upheld.

Each year, the successful tenderer shall provide a report to the contracting authority, including the proof that the conditions laid out regarding the sustainability of food are complied with, including proof of compliance for MSC labelled fish, various meat labels, fruit and vegetables and the Max Havelaar labelled food. In addition, a table containing this data must be permanently accessible to the contracting authority or its representative. For the percentage of organic and fair trade products, as well as fresh and frozen vegetables, the successful tenderer will be inspected annually at their own expense by an independent accredited control body (according to standard EN 45011). The costs of this control will be borne by the successful tenderer.

The successful tenderer will also supply necessary cleaning products for the cleaning of kitchens, dishwashers and disinfectants which are labelled [Ecogarantie](#) or equivalent.

Results

The call for tender was published on 30 March 2018 and one tender was received in the process. The contract value was almost €1.6million (before value added tax).

The successful bidder was a small enterprise, who, as a result of this contract has been able to focus their business entirely on sustainable food, and grow from four to 80 employees. In addition, four people, who could be classed as 'far from employment', are also being trained through 'social clause internships'. They will receive a maximum of 60 working days, at the rate of 38 hours per week spread over five days.

OLLN's approach to school catering enabled it to be one of the four winners of the Walloon award for the Most Responsible Procurement in 2018. More information available [here](#) (in French).

Environmental impacts

Through procuring healthy, sustainable school lunches, OLLN has had an upstream impact on the food market, as well as downstream impact in terms of consumer awareness. By promoting a sustainable diet, it is possible to reduce greenhouse gasses.

Managing food waste also has significant environmental impacts. By monitoring food waste, it has been possible for the City to drastically reduce food waste from its school canteens. In 2010 - the year in which the Meals Commission was first established - reductions in the percentage of food wasted could already be seen, falling from its maximum point of 28.7% in December 2010 to 13.2% by the end of the school year in June 2011. Due to the communication and cooperation facilitated by OLLN's Meals Commission, the average percentage of food waste per year has continued to fall, from 19.9% in 2010-2011 to 11.2% in 2017-2018.

Lessons learned

Suppliers can require some lead-in time in order to change their business practices. By gradually increasing the number of products meeting organic and seasonal requirements each year, producers and breeders had time to adapt their processes to meet the sustainability requirements.

In addition to supply, changing demand through food education has been an important part of this process. Encouraging the acceptance of food less known to children (such as legumes and other plant proteins, and cereals like quinoa and bulgur) is important for supporting a healthy diet and reducing food waste. Children are accompanied to the canteen by teachers, and taste education is considered an integral part of learning. Parents are also kept informed via a monthly menu, which includes information on the back about the origin and advantages of the food being served, and are required to register their children several days in advance for each meal, so that chefs know exactly how many children to cook for. Finally, those in charge of serving meals are provided with a minimum one day of training per year with a chef, involving discovering 'new' foods and visiting producers in the region.

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For more information on the good practice, please see this [video](#) (in French).

To download the Call for Tender document, please click [here](#).

For related information, please see European GPP criteria for [Food and Catering Services](#) and the [Technical Background Report](#).