



**Knowledge hub**  
-  
**Collection of best practices**

**Summary of the best practice**

1. Title of the best practice (e.g. name of policy, programme, project, etc.) \*

Sustainable Food School Programme (Programa de Sustentabilidade na Alimentação Escolar) & Conversations with Parents

2. Country or countries where the practice is implemented \*

Portugal-Torres Vedras

3. Please select the **most relevant** Action Track(s) the best practice applies to \*

- Action Track 1. Inclusive, equitable, safe, and healthy schools
- Action Track 2. Learning and skills for life, work, and sustainable development
- Action Track 3. Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession
- Action Track 4. Digital learning and transformation
- Action Track 5. Financing of education

4. Implementation lead/partner organization(s) \*

Organizations involved: Municipality of Torres Vedras, Parish Councils, Local Private Social Institutions

5. Key words (5-15 words): Please add key descriptive words around aims, modalities, target groups etc. \*

healthy food habits, Farmers, Parents' associations, Teachers, cooking, education, procurement, governance structure of school food in Portugal

6. What makes it a best practice? \*

The Sustainable Food School Programme is an integrated strategy to promote the local economy, environmental sustainability and quality school meals. By procuring local, seasonal food for schools, the Municipality aims to create jobs and generate local wealth, as well as educate pupils, their families and the school community about the importance of sustainable food consumption. The programme is divided into four axes, each representing a different stage of the 'farm to fork' process: production, acquisition, cooking, consumption and healthy habits. The Municipality has a long time programme to approach families to Education. It is called "Conversas com Pais" (Conversations with Parents).

## Description of the best practice

7.

Introduction (350-400 words)

This section should ideally provide the context of, and justification for, the practice and address the following issues:

- i) Which population was affected?
- ii) What was the problem that needed to be addressed?
- iii) Which approach was taken and what objectives were achieved? \*

The Municipality of Torres Vedras is responsible for the provision of 4,700 meals a day to children aged between 3 and 18, including to 65 kindergartens and primary schools (3 to 10 years old), 2 preparatory schools (10 to 14 years old) and 1 secondary school (15 to 18 years old).

The Sustainable Food School Programme was a political strategic vision in 2007, when the competences of the school meals management passed from central government to the municipalities. After 7 years working on this process, conditions were reunited to name the local work as a Programme. This is important, as moving from buying catering services from one large catering supplier, to establishing a system which allows participation of local farmers and which increases the organic content of school meals has increased the cost of supply. The strategic vision and political commitment of the municipal executive has therefore been essential in securing the budget to enable this investment in the local region. The municipality launched the Sustainable Food School Programme in 2014.

In September 2020, a national decision changed the governance structure of school food in Portugal, making the municipal-level responsible for school catering for all age groups up to age 17 (prior to this, the municipal level was only responsible for kindergarten and primary school canteens). This almost doubled the amount of food that they needed to source and provide.

## 8. Implementation (350-450 words)

Please describe the implementation modalities or processes, where possible in relation to:

- i) What are the main activities carried out?
- ii) When and where the activities were carried out (including the start date and whether it is ongoing)?
- iii) Who were the key implementation actors and collaborators? (civil society organizations, private sector, foundations, coalitions, networks etc.)?
- iv) What were the resources needed (budget and sources) for the implementation?

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Meals are currently distributed across the municipality using two distinct systems:

- Two municipally-owned kitchens supply 1,700 meals per day to schools within the city.
- A network of private caterers (called Private Social Institutions) which distribute -3,000 meals per day to schools across 12 rural counties.

For Municipality-owned kitchens, raw ingredients are purchased directly from suppliers. Menus are carefully prepared by publically-employed chefs with the support of a nutritionist and are based on the traditional Mediterranean Diet. The Municipality-owned kitchens operate as the laboratory kitchens, where menus are tested, and guidelines are prepared in order to instruct the private caterers. These are contracted directly as a service by local county authorities, to whom Torres Vedras delegates decision-making responsibility.

In the context of the 2020 national decision referred above, Torres Vedras aims in the short/medium-term to bring all local school canteens under the direct management of the municipality (3 preparatory schools + 1 secondary school under catering managing, where was not possible to integrate in the direct management), in order to better support the city's food strategy, and ensure the same level of food quality is available across the territory.

Another area where the Municipality would like to increase involvement and collaboration is with the parents of school children. It has already sought to create fun opportunities, such as the 'Lunch With Me in my Birthday' initiative, where parents and guardians are invited to lunch at the school canteen on their child's birthday, in order to strengthen the links between the school and the family, and raise awareness of the quality of school meals. And if a child's birthday is on the weekend or holiday, family members are still invited to lunch with them on another day after! In this vein, The Municipality has a long time programme to approach families to Education. It is called "Conversas com Pais" (Conversations with Parents).

## 9. Results – outputs and outcomes (250-350 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the questions below:

- i) How was the practice identified as transformative? (e.g., impact on policies, impact on management processes, impact on delivery arrangements or education monitoring, impact on teachers, learners and beneficiary communities etc.);
- ii) What were the concrete results achieved with regard to outputs and outcomes?
- iii) Has an assessment of the practice been carried out? If yes, what were the results? \*

Torres Vedras is an agricultural region. By supporting local production and small/medium-scale farmers, the Municipality aims to boost the local economy while also increasing the regions food autonomy. Through the provision of food preparation services, the non-profit social organisations have been able to support the employment of 60 people within the region. In this scenario, these institutions have a direct relation with their local farmers and suppliers, not depending of the public procurement system.

By working with social solidarity institutions, who provide the Municipality food preparation services, local jobs are created for people 'at distance to the labour market'.

The Sustainable Food School Programme has several environmental objectives. It aims to:

- stimulate short agri-food chains and minimize food-related transport emissions.
- achieve 30% organic food by 2022, in order to incentivize greater organic production and thereby avoid the release of harmful chemicals into the environment (as well as into the diets of school children).
- Reduce meat and fish consumption, by increasing the alternative menus with dairy, eggs and plant-based menus once a week.
- reduce food waste, by making sure meals are of a high quality, and by planning menus according to daily needs.
- Reduce packaging waste, by requiring produce to be delivered in boxes (when applicable) which are collected by the suppliers the following day for reuse.
- support small producers and value local varieties, thereby supporting biodiversity (and the resilience of the food system against pests, disease and climate change).

Finally, another important social element in the Torres Vedras approach is their desire to perpetuate local culture and heritage. As such, school food menus are carefully prepared with the support of a nutritionist according to the Mediterranean Diet. This ensures that meals are nutritionally balanced and reflect local seasons.

The Sustainable Food School Programme is aligned to be able to measure against specific indicators, clustered in four different categories ("axes"):

Axis I - PRODUCTION

- a) Quantity of vegetables and fruits available by seasonality per supplier (Kg);
- b) Monitoring the % of organic products;
- c) Number of students enrolled in the 'BioHorta' school gardens/year;
- d) Cultivation planning and registration for each school garden;
- e) Monitoring the number of study visits to organic farms.

Axis II - ACQUISITION

- a) Quantification of the distance/time between the production and the consumption place;
- b) % of package free products;
- c) % of non-compliant product with replacement on the same day.

Axis III - CONFECTION

- a) Quantification by weight of food waste inherent in the preparation of meals for subsequent composting, at the municipal kitchens;
- b) Daily monitoring of product consumption, number of meals and respective unit price (general menu and vegetarian menu);

c) Monthly monitoring of the cost sheet with quantification of the management of expenses and balances of municipal kitchens;

Axis IV - CONSUMPTION

a) Monitoring the number of participants in the "Lunch with Me in My Birthday" with the respective analysis of questionnaires delivered to the participating parents;

b) Monitoring the quantity of fruits and milk free distributed in public schools;

c) Analysis of the satisfaction assessment of the service providing and cooking meals by each Education and Teaching Establishment and in the Municipality;

d) Accounting for the number of awareness-raising actions for each school year in the context of healthy eating, food waste and other topics associated with healthy lifestyles aimed at primary school students.

e) Quantification by weight of food waste inherent to meal leftovers after lunch.

School children play an active role in sorting food leftovers and monitoring waste, which is weighed on a daily basis. The results are used to adapt menus and avoid future waste.

## 10. Lessons learnt (300 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the following questions:

- i) What were the key triggers for transformation?
- ii) What worked really well – what facilitated this?
- iii) What did not work – why did it not work? \*

The Municipality buys its raw ingredients exclusively from local producers and suppliers, thereby promoting territorial development and increasing the turnover and employment of the agricultural sector.

Direct contact with suppliers is very important for matching regional supply and demand, and Torres Vedras is a rural territory where agriculture is a high developed sector.

Two examples:

- For the organic vegetable lot, there is a direct interaction between the farmer-supplier by planning the weekly quantities needed for the municipal kitchens. This represents the possibility of the total production flow, contributing to the food waste reduction in the field;
- For the organic fruits lot, caliber was deleted in the specific criteria, and substituted by the number of pieces needed to provide to guarantee the right daily fruit to be eaten by the students according to their age. This is also a good practice to decrease the food waste in the production phase.

The municipality has to make sure that local suppliers are actually able to provide the food that they need, when they need it, and in the quantities required. To make the contract accessible to small- and medium- suppliers, Torres Vedras has split their food supply contract into 'lots' (e.g. organic fruit, vegetable, meat, fish).

Having separate lots for organic food, for example, allows the municipality to buy the organic food that is available, according to the designed production plan, without setting requirements for the provision that would necessitate the sourcing of organic produce from outside of the region or country.

Torres Vedras had to design their tender specifications carefully in order to enable procurement from local farmers and suppliers, while also complying with European procurement regulations. They used a combination of 'technical specifications' (mandatory requirements) and 'award criteria' to find the suppliers best able to meet their needs.

Mandatory requirements:

- Ability to supply in bulk (if applicable);
- Capacity of suppliers to provide the daily quantities for the meals. In the case of fresh products (fruits, vegetables and livestock products), is mandatory to be a producer besides a supplier, and also to allow study visits to schools into their facilities/farms;
- Replacement of products that do not meet quality standards on the same delivery day, to not compromise the daily cook needs.

Award criteria:

- Price, only 20% or 30% of the total punctuation, depending on the lot;
- Quality – is evaluated according to the product quality through sample verification, accompanied by the respective technical sheet;
- Freshness – assessed according to the amount of time taken to transport food (in minutes) to the consumption place.

#### CHALLENGES

One of the main challenges which Torres Vedras faces is balancing their desire to support local production and reduce food miles against their demand for organic or sustainably cultivated produce. Currently, the supply of local organic foods does not meet the demand and increasing local availability of land for organic production is the next challenge that Torres Vedras would like to address. Besides, getting local farmers to adopt more sustainable and healthy practices remains a challenge.

The decision in September 2020 to make the municipal level responsible for all school food provision increased significantly the amount of food that Torres Vedras had to source and

provide. It does however create immediate challenges for continuing to source all the food from within the territory. Another challenge related to procurement is that public procurement rules do not allow for local food requirements. Finding appropriate methods to ensure public procurement supports local suppliers while adhering to public procurement regular. Lastly, with the initiative 'conversation with parents' it has been observed that getting parents on board is still a challenge.

## 11. Conclusions (250 words)

Please describe why may this intervention be considered a “best practice”. What recommendations can be made for those intending to adopt the documented “best practice” or how can it help people working on the same issue(s)? \*

As part of an the “Food! Agrifood Short Circuits for the Human Right to Adequate Food” (AlimentAÇÃO! Circuitos Curtos Agroalimentares para o Direito Humano a uma Alimentação Adequada) initiative, two rounds of dialogue were held. The dialogue process resulted in the following recommendations:

- I. Create and implement public policies that promote more sustainable production methods and to centralize the products in a place/producer association in order to fill stock shortages (long-term ambition);
- II. Encourage the creation of quality product niches by reinforcing the direct points of sale for organic produce (medium-term ambition);
- III. Stimulate the training offer to support local production and train new farmers and local producers with knowledge of more agroecological practices;
- IV. Foster local food culture, encourage the use of traditional food diversity, and optimize available food resources, with a view to improving markets, reformulating the dynamics that promote increased sales, stability, reduction risks and increased food diversity;
- V. Develop a Municipal Food Council as a priority.

In term of next steps, Torres Vedras is now advocating that Civic Parish common land should be re-appropriated for growing organic fruit and vegetables to supply local canteens. This will require collaboration between the Municipality and Parishes Councils to arrive at an appropriate land use model.

To achieve this, a number of Municipal departments will need to be engaged:

- Legal department (on land use regulation);
- Environmental and Sustainability Division (on analysis of soil quality and regarding an ongoing reforestation projects);
- Strategic and Territorial Planning Division on land mapping
- Division of Education and Physical Activity (PSAE) on the schools supply data;
- Public Procurement and Patrimony Division on supply bids;
- Municipal nurseries on fruit tree and vegetable crop supply;
- Financial Division to provide a budget envelope;
- Division of Municipal Infrastructure and Building on building infrastructure support;
- Division of Human Resources in the recruitment process;
- Communication Division, in order to disseminate the project at local and national levels.

Just as important, external actors will need to be engaged, including:

- The Parish Councils
- Not-for-profit organisations
- Agency “Investir Torres Vedras”, via its SMART FARM COLAB project on agricultural production improvement
- Local agricultural enterprises
- The agricultural school, for technical support and future trained workers.

Finally, public procurement rules mean that public buyers need to set limits to the number of years one company can be a public provider. They also mean that the municipality need to define the monetary value of their public contracts in advance. This requires the buyer to accurately define the amount of food it needs to purchase each year. The constraints of Public Procurement request strategies about what to consider in tenders’ criteria, to allow the guaranty of each territory strategy.

To conclude we can say that the Sustainable Food School Programme address many food system challenges through school meals and is a virtuous approach to apply also beyond

Portugal. However, there are challenges to address that could make this program much more effective.

## 12. Further reading

Please provide a list and URLs of key reference documents for additional information on the “best practice” for those who may be interested in knowing how the results benefited the beneficiary group/s. \*

<http://www.cm-tvedras.pt/>

<https://hub.urgenci.net/beacons/torres-sustainable-school-food-program/>

<https://ec.europa.eu/environment/gpp/pdf/Rodrigues-2020-04-23.pdf>

<https://www.energyglobe.info/international/finalist/2021/municipality-of-torres-vedras>

<https://rsaiconnect.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/rsp3.12508>