

Concept note on the potential of food service to deliver sustainable food and how the question of food public procurement is integrated with the local food supply chains.

The following paper has been written from notes reported by Mark Stein, Andrea Pezzana and Isabelle Lacourt on the participation to the Workshop Hearing "*Feeding the planet sustainability, from foresight to better integrated policies*" organized in Brussels, November 19-20 2012.

The objective of the hearing was to check if the configuration of policies currently regulating food production is sufficient to keep in view environmental impacts and also social impacts, to further set up the working program for the next months and to define relevant objectives to guide achievement. All these guidelines for reflexion are not meant to be exhaustive of the whole commitment of the project Eating City, but are intended to stimulate further dialogue and thinking upon the possibility for ARC 2020 and Eating City to collaborate and create synergies for they own activities.

The lack of sustainability of actual food production patterns.

During the hearing, all speakers brought evidences that in prospective of our future, **the current model of food production is NOT sustainable**, either considering the state of natural resources, the increase of food related diseases, or the evolution of demography.

Environmental Frame

Current food system's unsustainability is not anymore on question but because our limited understanding of all parameters and interactions ruling food and eco-systems, the various models proposed by researchers for agriculture and food consumption patterns so far do not give a clear clue on the solutions to solve environmental problems whilst ensuring at the same time the necessary level of agriculture productivity.

Therefore still today, in absence of clear-cut solutions, decisions makers, in front of crisis, foster economic levers to the detriment of environmental aspects that are still subordinated, as a secondary priority, to better times.

The calculation of economical impacts and the introduction of environmental indicators in food system economics would be a step further to clarify the levers for action, at least to introduce externalities in cost evaluation. But a general method for sustainability metrics recognized by all stakeholders is still missing.

Health frame

An other range of dramatic evidences derives from epidemiologic data about food related diseased, such as « diabetesity » , resulting from high fat and sugar contents in occidental

style diet. Calories' intakes are overabundant but diet are lacking the necessary amount of secondary metabolites and **there are many evidences that food quality must become our objective rather than food quantity.**

However, as health depend on so many factors, and once again in absence of clear-cut effect of each single piece of food on health, and since effects result from long term intake and can be affected by many other parameters, decision maker delay necessary decisions in order to look for the right compromise between the freedom of choice of consumers - thus giving space to unhealthy but attractive food - and the necessity to prevent unhealthy eating habits.

In conclusion

If all researchers invited to speak gave evidences on the unsustainability of current food production and consumption patterns in Europe and worldwide, they could not indicate clear solutions to overcome environmental and health criticalities.

The main reason was the complexity of models, due to the unpredictability of many parameters, including the future consumption patterns of emerging countries.

Therefore it is clear that in the absence of reference scenario and within the actual conditions of European deep economical crisis, all decisions affecting primary and secondary production sectors, such as agriculture or food industry are extremely difficult to take because affecting global food security. **However the unanimous statement of the unsustainability of actual food production patterns must prevail upon us to act.**

The potential of food services to deliver sustainable food.

To get out of such "blocked" situation, Public Procurement could be immediately considered as a leverage for the shift of paradigm. Today, 40% of calories are consumed out of home. Within food service, public food service represents in Europe 21 billions of meals served every year for an annual turnover of 77 billion euro. Such an amount of money is relevant but very low if compared to the 954 billions of euro of the annual turnover of the whole european food and beverage industry, especially if we consider that only 1/3 of the public food service turnover is used to buy food.

Therefore the economic lever of public procurement seems appropriate to give a strong signal of change and innovation by promoting the emergence of more sustainable food production and consumption patterns without the risk of sudden destabilisation of the whole european F&B industry.

Several problems and barriers still must be overcome .

1- Public Procurement generally based on the lowest price

Today Public Procurement is generally based on the lowest price. There are already guidelines for green procurement as it has been already recognized by the European Commission as a potential driver of change. They are clear enough but not well disseminated. Not only natural inertia leads public buyers to do the same as they did previous years but the fear of legal problems and the misunderstanding of EU procurement regulations explain why in most of the cases, tenders are awarded to lowest bidder which cancel any ambitions of bidders (catering companies), to be actively involved in sustainability.

The current GPP rules also must be adapted to **food procurement specificities** deriving mainly from two main features: food is having strong impact on the health of consumers and it is a natural product and may be deeply influenced by environmental conditions during production and conservation.

Although through EU, ***many cases show that meal quality can be increased without raising meal price***, it is not clear for all decision makers that to fulfill such condition, it is necessary to re-engineer public food service through a time consuming and innovative process. Moreover, innovation is needed in sustainable food procurement through new forms of partnerships between private and public bodies, in order to gradually involve food industry in this process.

2- The lack of a sustainable food supply chain that integrates local food.

The question of local food can be related to the importance of agriculture in all the EU territories. The number of farmers is reducing and without farmers, agriculture will disappear or intensify with dramatic social and environmental consequences in both cases. A tight tissue of farmers can warrant local food sourcing although it is clear than food need to be sourced both locally and globally in the majority of the cases.

- ⤴ The promotion of fresh local food is a way to reduce the intake of highly processed unbalanced food by the consumers.
- ⤴ It is also a way to reconnect consumers with the reality of food production : culture and traditional recipes, generally healthy, but not always, can be used to promote local and seasonal food consumption.
- ⤴ Short supply chain or direct sale by farmers is a way to get fresh products at a fair price for both producer and consumer.

But there are several limits for the development of local food production. The difficulty to find farmland close to urban and peri-urban areas, the lack of logistics facilities to enable an easy access to the market for small producers and the fact that local products cannot

be sourced directly by public procurement. How can we rebuild the bridge between the cities and the campaign?

3- The specific question of meat consumption

The question of the meat consumption highlights an interesting cross-cut of environmental, health and economical aspects of food sustainability. This question has been repeatedly brought in all discussion sessions by several participants.

Meat production, especially by using intensive methods is creating high negative impacts on environment and many scenarios indicate that there will not be enough land to produce the necessary quantity of meat if the worldwide population decides to raise meat consumption levels to occidental standards.

However nutrition analyses indicate that the level of meat consumption according to occidental standards is responsible for a large part of food-related diseases.

Moreover, to reduce meat content in public food service is a good way to improve meal quality, by replacing part of animal proteins with vegetal proteins, without increasing the budget, as meat, even of poor quality, is expensive.

In the meantime it is worth considering the economical sector of meat production, even looking at the point of view of agricultural land. Not all agricultural areas can be cultivated and cattle can give value to preserve necessary grasslands. Therefore it must be underlined that straightforward negative assumptions about meat production could damage unnecessarily an important agricultural and food production sector.

Quality versus quantity can be the way to rebalance meat production and consumption and common sense leads to put into question intensive husbandry practices.

4-Food safety regulations can be counterproductive with sustainable development

The necessity of food safety rules is to put into question here.

However it is one of the constraints today to implement sustainable re-engineering of meals. For instance, food safety regulations can be unnecessarily tight and restrictive for smaller producers.

They are also one of the causes for the preoccupying amount of food waste and leftovers.

5 - The loss of knowledge and culture - food standardization

The new generations face a lack of a food culture. Most of the time they don't know where food comes from, they don't know how to cook. This explains why wrong food diet and habits are rapidly increasing in the population : they are related with sedentarity and consumption of highly processed, hyper caloric food.

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By Isabelle Lacourt - *Jan. 31st 2013*

The objectives highlighted by the participants of the hearing .

1- A good reinforcement of the messages could be the creation of a link between environmental considerations and nutritional guidelines in the Public Procurement rules.

Specific rules have to be defined for food procurement according its strong relationships with common goods such as environment, social and health interactions. At this step food safety regulations must ne analysed and questionned in order to be coherent with the new requirements.

The most recent guidelines (WCRF-AICR about cancer prevention, NCEP-III about cardiovascular diseases and metabolic syndrome, USDA, INRAN, etc.) already agree on the following topics:

- ⤴ eat less
- ⤴ eat more vegetables
- ⤴ use a variety of vegetables (different colours, follow the seasons)
- ⤴ avoid large amounts of animal proteins, mainly meat (but high quality meat remains an interesting food also for the health, we don't have to become vegetarian, even if it can be a reasonable choice)
- ⤴ avoid deply processed food, energy-dense food, nutrient-poor food
- ⤴ increase physical activity

2- Reduction of meal environmental impacts (starting from public food service) by re-engineering and increasing eco-efficiency of meal preparation.

The following points can become part of HGPP rules.

Use less meat and make better use of meat.

Some tenders included more meat or fish gram weights in meals' specifications than necessary for a correct diet. It is possible to reduce the total meat consumption, according to health and environmental criterions (as Greenhouse Gas Emissions are linked particularly to meat and dairy production) and replace overabundant animal proteins with less expensive sources of proteins and therefore shift costs to buy high quality organic and /or fresh vegetables.

There is still a role for meat in our diet. The shift must be from quantity to quality, buying high quality meat (organic, animal welfare standards etc.).

Foster seasonal food consumption and menu flexibility.

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The introduction of seasonal food is an accompanying measure of the use of local fresh ingredients avoiding energy consuming greenhouse crops. It can be a way to get good value fresh food. For the same reason it can be of help to allow flexibility in the menus in order to buy food at the best price according to the production. (both aspects are particularly relevant for fresh fruit and vegetables).

Reduce food leftovers and food waste

The risk when developing efficient food waste management procedures is to consider meals leftovers as a good source of waste to produce compost or energy. Also the redistribution of edible leftovers by linking with food banks must remain a secondary solution to the problem of food waste.

Waste prevention remains the main objective. Reducing the food waste cannot be done outside the exercise of the complete re-engineering of meal production. In particular the reduction of food leftovers must be achieved by improving meal quality. Therefore waste costs must be evaluated in order to be shifted to staff training and better ingredients.

3- Reduction of meal environmental impacts by interventions in the territory.

Increasing organic agriculture and organic food production.

Agriculture represents the most important environmental impact of food production. There are possibilities to shift costs: one of the best examples today is the replacement of the construction of plants destined to water nitrates depollution by farmers conversion to organic agriculture (see for instance in France the case of Lons le Sauniers).

Building up sustainable food supply chains

Regional food hubs

Regional food supply and demand analysis should be regularly performed, including the definition of needs and the facilitation of the cooperation between farmers who want to have access to new opportunities offered by public food services.

It is necessary to create or identify **food hubs** where local producers can send or bring food which can be distributed to the neighbouring cities (for instance at a regional level), helping SMEs to cope with the logistical challenge of speedy distribution to a large number of customers (eg schools scattered around a city).

These regional food hubs should be connected with organic and fair trade food networks. However their objective is to reinforce local economy by using part of peri-urban and regional products destined to local consumption. They are suitable for consumer

cooperatives, retail stores and public food service supply.

Public service buyers are a pillar of this new supply chain. Even if they do not offer the highest prices, they need large amount of food on a regular and predictable basis; therefore they can absorb a large part of local production giving a steady revenue and avoiding time consuming direct selling activities.

Logistics related to these food hubs can be readily subjected to a continuous improvement process according to eco-efficiency indicators.

Also economical indicators, including job creation, should be monitored as an other indicator to assess the efficiency of local food supply chain in relation with the level of activity of these regional food hubs.

Farmers markets

Farmers can sell the products directly to consumers or to restaurants. They are an important part of this new supply chain network; not necessarily in terms of quantity but mainly in terms of education and awareness of the whole population.

Urban Agriculture

Some cities already started to evaluate the potential of urban agriculture, also to produce food for self managed public food service. This could be combined with measures to encourage young people to go into farming.

4- Communication to influence food consumption patterns

Researchers raised the following questions : which level of responsibility must be left to the consumers ? Are they entitled to make their own choice guided by transparent labeling ? Who must influence food consumption ? Public authorities ? Food companies ? Or consumers themselves ?

The promotion of best practices - awareness raising for decision makers.

The case study of Copenhagen presented during the hearing teach many aspects about implementing food sustainability that should be spread in the whole EU territory:

- ⤴ it needs a complete re-engineering of the meal, replacing industrialized products by man know how, thus maintaining jobs.
- ⤴ it uses leftover reduction as one of the levers to increase meal quality without raising price, thus obtaining a double result : to get better value for money and to reduce waste. Such optimization can be generalized as a start for any project.
- ⤴ it becomes a tool of food education (including sensibilization on food waste) through experience and not theory .

Although the case of Copenhagen does not offer a unique and universal model that could be replicated, as it was underlined, it is still the demonstration of the "value for money" of smart -long term viewed public food procurement.

Best practices should be collected and reviewed in order to demonstrate the faisability of HGPP all over the European territory by using different approaches according to different conditions. Although they might not be reproducible in all EU territory, they still can be inspiring. Best practices should be promoted and shared: website efficiency has been questioned, forums and workshops could be good complements.

Food education - raising public awareness . Reinforcement or creation of food education programs destined to staff and to consumers in relation with national/european campaigns aiming at promoting a new food culture amongst population

As behavioural changes are so difficult, even with the evidence of the role of our lifestyle in improving sustainability, a help to the consumers in considering the olistic effect of the efforts could somehow help. That's why the European Commission should support evidence-based sustainability promotion programs, consumers oriented, including and combining as much as possible the different areas above mentioned, **not forgetting that public food services provides food on a daily basis to one citizen every six.**

Food education programs can be organised within different public food services such as schools, hospitals, enterprises, jails etc. Traditional foods can be a central topic as the value of traditional food is often related to taste, nutrition and environment. The staff must be trained to prepare these traditionnal recipes based on fresh ingredients.

Staff information, advice and retraining: to reinforce sustainability often means to introduce more know-how.

The approach is to work with local practitioners - cooks, catering managers, procurement managers – and to encourage different ways of doing things.

Interestingly, many cooks preparing meals in schools, hospitals, have the feeling that sustainability should become the specificity of public food service and consequently a characteristic able to stimulate new professional vocations for what has been for too long a sidelined, second choice job.

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Thank you for your attention.

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