

‘Connecting Food Dots’ Increasing Food Resilience in Cities during COVID-19 time

A video statement from The “Eating City - Board of Directors”



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Together to share a new vision of public food services

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Introduction

The 'Eating City International Platform' is a not for profit NGO. It delivers a program of activities which promote food governance and sustainability, particularly in the Sustainable Development of Public Foodservices. The Platform has an international reach and offers a range of business support and research activity while its primary focus is working with the world's future decision makers and influencers in the food sector. Through Eating Cities specialists and managers, aged 22 to 32, benefit from a unique blend of mentoring and expert insight into the rationale and challenges of implementing sustainable development in the commercial world of foodservice and hospitality.

Eating City has a successful track record of collaborative working with local and regional governments, universities, foundations, schools and other public institutions as well as private catering services and restaurants. There are 200 potential 'Eating City Ambassadors' in over 50 countries.

Link to the video statement: <https://youtu.be/d3tExKkVQm4>

Maurizio Mariani, Director of Eating City

Why are Public Food Services important during in this Pandemic?

Public Food Service (PFS) is an asset in the control of every city and region. The social and economic attributes associated with it are considerable and it has unrivalled reach into every community in the EU through food provided in schools, hospitals, prisons, universities and colleges.

The scope and scale is enormous which makes its critical area of activity:

- 81 bn revenue
- 2 million workers
- 81 million meals per day.

The supply chain that supports PFS is also extensive and 60% of employees work in SMEs but SME producers and processors are disadvantaged achieving only 45% of the market value.

A rebalancing in favour of more local and sustainable procurement could create thousands of jobs in rural areas and in cities creating a more sensitive and resilient food system.

Environmental Impact

The Agri industry and food miles cause significant air pollution. There is new research evidencing that the Covid-19 virus is showing a correlation between the virus and air pollution.

Redesigning PFS in the pandemic:

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New York and Milan are examples where these cities (and some others) have developed a Food Aid System to help limit the spread of the virus.

It has become clear that there is a need to create more synergy in the food system - to 'connect the food dots' between producers – processors- distributors – caterers and consumers to create a fairer and more sustainable system that supports a more localised sustainable food chain that places good employment, locally produced food and public food service at its core.

Witness Statement by: Robin Gourlay OBE - Scotland

Food served in schools, hospitals and elsewhere holds within it the opportunity to create a social, economic and environmental dividend. Public Food is essentially about the health, education and well- being of people particularly in this public health emergency.

In this time of the Covid pandemic that idea of PFS as more than the school or hospital meal on a plate comes to the fore.

PFS should in fact be regarded as part of each country and region's 'Critical National Infrastructure'. In these times of forced self-isolation and panic buying of food vulnerable people – the elderly, the sick and the disadvantaged should not be left to fend for themselves.

But, not all cities and regions have responded well to taking care of these vulnerable people.

In Scotland for example Public Food Managers have responded quickly developing a range of systems to meets local need;

- Turning school dining rooms and community centres into community food hubs
- Distributing meals –hot and freshly cooked, chilled or frozen
- Offering vouchers or cash to buy food, or
- Delivering food packs to people in hardship.

Importantly, in this and any future disaster or pandemic;

- The Human Right to Food should be recognised
- There should be an absolute duty on local and national governments to meet that right
- The feeding of vulnerable people should be planned for in advance and not left to chance
- The creation of an IT solution to allow people to access food is critical
- This should be where appropriate a public and private collaboration involving tech solutions, PFS and local food producers and suppliers.

Witness Statement by Dr Katie Wilson – Executive director of Urban School food alliance, USA

In this pandemic it is evident that we must ensure access to food for every human being. Yet in the few weeks and months of the pandemic we have seen food insecurity escalate particularly for children.

As schools have closed - the places where many can be sure of being provided with nourishment for growth - so has the access to food for millions of children.

For too long the food system has been allowed to rest in the hands of 'others' with food travelling many miles to reach the consumer disconnecting them from the food that sustains them.

To recover from this health and economic crisis we must look again at:

- The importance of access to food
- The role of healthy food for well being
- The importance of this for communities
- To recognise why the current pandemic has highlighted the extent of food insecurity
- The importance of more local production and the links to people who consume it
- This is issue of Human Right and Social Justice
- We should regard agriculture as form of nourishment as well as an economic asset to sustain communities
- Food is a catalyst for peace, equity and sound governance in all sections of society.

Witness Statement by: Giuseppe Mastruzzo - Director of IUC, Turin Italy.

The language of the Corona Virus pandemic focusses on Social Distancing and thinking about ourselves and our individual safety. Is Social Protection more appropriate indicating that we are taking steps to protect ourselves as well as the communities where we live.

In these times of confinement for weeks in our homes it is to preserve the right to life for us all. The Right to Life pertains to us all and the Human Right to Life must be filled with other Rights that humanly worth to be lived and that that 'Right to Life' is full.

The Commons are defined as both tangible and intangible spaces – public parks or the internet for example – goods and services that are essential to our development as citizens and human personae.

One of these spaces that makes a community is food. From the vantage point of the pandemic, Food must be regarded from now on as a Commons. Food can not be just a commodity. We can see in our urban spaces many people at the margins are now cut off from the basic means of living.

The pandemic crisis teaches us that we must rethink; spaces, services and goods in the metropolitan context.

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- Food is not a commodity and must be guaranteed as a Commons, with proper access to it for everyone.
- Cities must realise that in this or any future pandemic a network of public food provision to be shared as a Commons for everyone that needs it is essential for the well-being of the whole of the community.
- The most basic Right of Human Life is a proper offer of food for everybody.

Conclusion by: Maurizio Mariani

The shift in paradigm needed is move food – now regarded as a utility - to a recognition of food as a Commons and to embed this philosophy to ensure there is an increase the food resilience of cities. Cities should in response to this emergency use existing kitchens, now closed during the crisis, with the supporting logistics and infrastructures to implement a delivery system that serves vulnerable and disadvantaged people at their home and simultaneously ‘connect the dots’ between local SMEs, farmers, fishermen and processors. This will require

- Utilising experience, and
- Sharing logistics
- Increasing efficiency
- Creating an online platform to ‘connect the food dots’
- Encompassing people displaced from employment as a result of the pandemic who are in need of new work.

Maurizio Mariani commended the Milan Food Policy Pact and urged all cities to join in creating innovative Food Policies and build robust food resilience within every city.

‘That is the future we need for the - next normal’.