

Position Paper  
**Public Foodservice**



Eating City Focus Group

PP FGPFS 1

November 2018, By Robin Gourlay

**Together to share a new vision of public food services**

## Contents:

Introduction .....	3
Foodservice.....	3
The Eating City Focus Groups.....	4
Research – Public Foodservice focus Group.....	4
Context for sustainable public foodservices .....	5
Background.....	6
Impact.....	7
A Responsibility of Government .....	8
Costs .....	8
A Digital Future .....	10
The Importance of Food Education, Training leading to Behaviour Change. ....	10
Local and Global.....	11
The Importance of Menus and Procurement Strategy.....	11
Special Diets, Demographics, Religion and Immigration.....	12
The Role of Civil Society .....	12
Conclusion .....	12

## **Introduction**

The Eating City Platform stimulates business and social dialogue for a more sustainable food system in the public sector. It also highlights good practices and develops proposals to shift the current paradigm to one where food, health, environment and social values meet the economy. The Platform was conceived in 2010 as a programme of activities and experiential learning. It is co-funded by the CLM Foundation for the Progress of Humankind in Paris and other public and private partners.

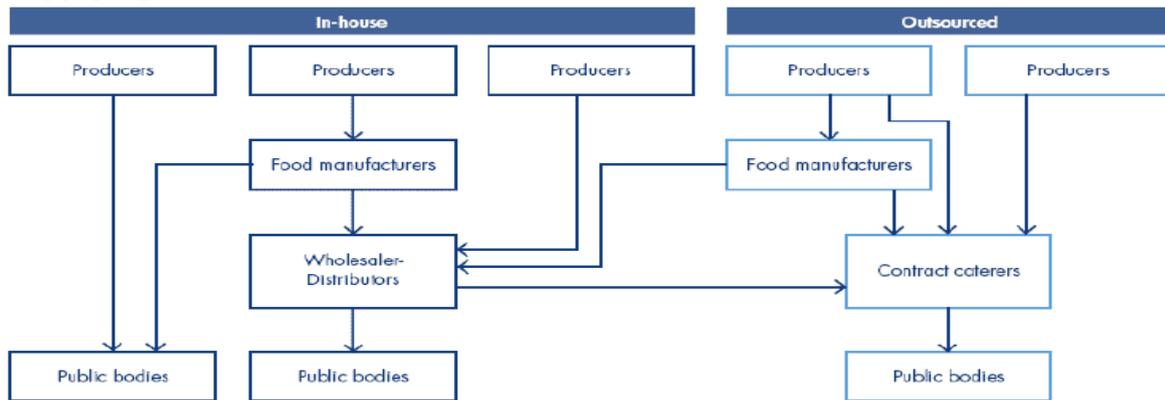
The Platform promotes food governance and sustainability, particularly in *the Sustainable Development of Public Foodservices*. It has an international reach with truly global connections, and disseminates a range of support and research activities, whilst its main focus is working with young professionals, academics and influencers in the food sector. Through Eating City, early career managers, producers, specialists, students involved in the food system, aged 22 to 32, benefit from expert knowledge that deepens their understanding, and shows how to deal successfully with the challenges of implementing Sustainable Development in the commercial world of foodservice.

Eating City also seeks to both challenge and bring to the fore a variety of experiences and fresh thinking from these early career catering and procurement professionals, farmers, fishers, academics, dieticians, manufacturers and distributors of food.

The vision that Eating City holds for the future is to empower people early in their working lives to become the actors who will change the paradigm of “business for businesses” to champion “business for people”, which Eating City believes is a maxim for sustainable food systems transformation.

### **Foodservice**

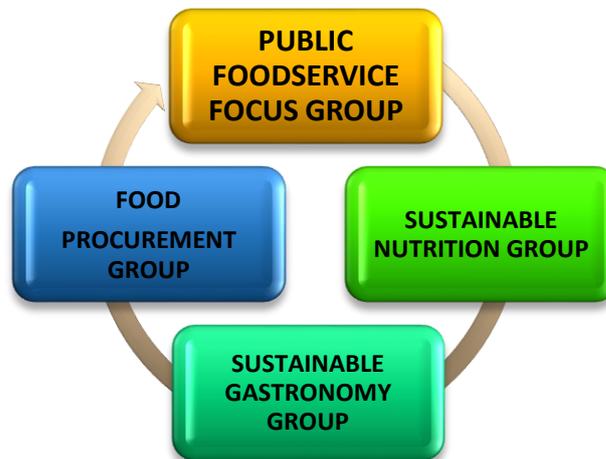
Foodservice means those businesses, civic institutions, and companies responsible for meals prepared outside the home. This includes restaurants, schools and hospitals, catering operations, and many other public funded situations. Eating City is interested in all of these while its primary focus is schools and welfare catering, which is the largest sector and perhaps the most influential sector; our platform challenges how and where food is procured, the nature of food that is sourced, how it is prepared and consumed, and how it can be used to produce multiple benefits for society, the economy and the environment, which are the 3 pillars of Sustainable Development.



Source: National Audit Office

### The Eating City Focus Groups

There are 3 Focus Groups that help inform and develop Eating City’s Public Foodservice priorities. Each of the Groups has a pivotal role within Eating City for research and food-related agenda to improve sustainability in the delivery of public food services. The results of research carried out by Focus Groups are the building blocks for the EC programme of activities.



The Public Foodservice Focus Group (PFS) was formed in 2017 and is the overarching Focus Group. It is composed of experts on the management of public food services, nutrition and procurement in the USA, Italy, France, Scotland, and the cities of Copenhagen and Ghent.

The goal of the Public Food Service Focus Group is ‘to create a new business model and procurement guideline for public food service that fits a new economic paradigm for good employment, health and the environment’.

### Research – Public Foodservice focus Group

Since 2010 Eating City has produced a range of books, research, essays and guidance for public foodservices and food governance. The latest research below has been used to

**Together to share a new vision of public food services**

inform this Position Paper, which states the Position of the Eating City Public Food Services Focus Group.

### **An Overview of the European Foodservices Market; Eating City, Mariani and Stojanovic, 2018.**

This research paper was produced to support the work of the Eating City Public Foodservice Focus Group. The PFS Group is foremost concerned with Social Foodservice meaning the provision of food in schools, hospitals, care homes and at other publicly funded institutions. The research demonstrates the potential of catering and public food procurement to lead in a change of diet that would produce a positive effect on public health. Other key issues that are considered include employment, which is declining in the production and service sector, the economy and environmental concerns. The paper then sets out an Eating City proposal specifically for Social Foodservice. A variety of data sets have been interrogated: the principal sources used are a combination of data available through Eurostat's website, and Eating City data compiled over 20 years (1996-2016).

### **Context for sustainable public foodservices**

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations summarises sustainable diets as: *"[Those] diets with low environmental impacts which contribute to food and nutrition security and to healthy life for present and future generations."*

A sustainable food system is defined by the European Commission as one that encompasses: *"security of the supply of food, health, safety, affordability, quality, a strong food industry in terms of jobs and growth and, at the same time, environmental sustainability, in terms of issues such as climate change, biodiversity, water and soil quality."*

In a 2014 report that focuses on sustainable food systems and food waste within the EU, the European Commission highlights five primary areas that are contributing to the unsustainability of the food system:

1. *Efficiency of resource use in production;*
2. *Levels of food wastage;*
3. *Competition for resources from other sectors;*
4. *Size of the population; and*
5. *composition of diets.*

***'The arrival of these issues as interconnected sustainability concerns raises new questions for the governance of food, resulting in the shifting of responsibilities between the state, private and civic sectors' (Marsden and Morley, 2014)***

The Eating City PFS Group focusses on health and nutrition to deliver sustainable menus in Public or Social Foodservice. However, menus served in schools, hospitals and elsewhere must in these terms also consider a range of issues to meet the needs of its large and diverse customer population, such as menus that:

**Together to share a new vision of public food services**

1. *Deliver healthful, nutritious, safe and appealing food;*
2. *Are culturally (and religiously) acceptable;*
3. *Can be procured competitively and affordably;*
4. *Protect the planet's biodiversity and ecosystems; and*
5. *Optimise natural and human resources in the supply chain.*

Achieving menus that deliver these objectives in Social Services settings is therefore complex for both the caterer and the procurement manager, as it is for the supply side too.

## **Background**

Food is at the root of some of the world's greatest environmental and societal challenges.

There are significant challenges facing governments in Europe and globally that are caused directly by the prevailing food system – the current system is not efficient with around a third of all food wasted rather than consumed; 30% of GHGs are attributable to the food chain, which is a major factor in climate change; the escalating societal and human cost of obesity, and other diet related diseases; the consequences of an ageing population in the EU, and globally a population that is set to increase from 7 to 9 billion suggesting global food production may have to increase by 60%; price shocks are increasingly pervasive with both political and social ramifications; vulnerable rural communities are in decline while globally migration into cities poses important questions for employment and social integration; and, the agrifood sector is characterised by a lack of skills in agriculture, horticulture and food and drink processing.

There is at the same time a diminution of food preparation skills across society in favour of manufactured processed food: both impact on the health of consumers and concentrate power in the food system into the hands of largescale multinational companies disconnecting citizens and anonymising the food people eat.

A successful sustainable food purchasing policy and the menus offered should be fully integrated with the overall goals and objectives of the institution. It should clearly state coherence with corporate social and environmental goals and commit resources to its strategy. It should also set targets and timelines and establish means for evaluating progress and making course corrections.

The PFS Focus Group has adopted a working definition of healthy and sustainable menus that includes:

- The use of good quality, unprocessed, nutritious ingredients that promote health and wellbeing and protect the environment;
- Reduced consumption of animal-based products (particularly meat and dairy) in favour of more plant based menus;

- Fresh and in season food where it is most appropriate, from local food producers and support for rural economies;
- Food that is sourced from production processes using farming techniques and fishery management practices that protect the environment;
- A viable livelihood for farmers, processors and retailers, whose employees enjoy a safe and hygienic working environment, whether in the EU or globally;
- Encouraging the use of Independent 3<sup>rd</sup> Party food safety accreditations by SME producers in the supply chain;
- Creating meals that are culturally appropriate and promote health;
- Reduced food waste;
- Public Foodservices that provide consumer information and training for procurement and catering staff that will support behaviour change toward a more sustainable and healthy food system; and in summary
- Providing foodservices that deliver wider benefits and value for money based on the multidimensional sustainability pillars – social, economic and environmental.

## **Impact**

While expenditure on Public Foodservices sector is relatively small compared to the purchasing of retail and supermarkets, the Eating City research shows that in the EU it still represents annually 81 billion euros across schools, hospitals, care homes, prisons, higher education and workplace canteens; every day 1 in 6 of the population is served by these institutions (An Overview of the European Foodservices Market, Eating City, Mariani and Stojvanovic, 2018).

Clearly Social Foodservices (meaning school, welfare and the care sector), which are substantially funded by governments, should be responding to the food related challenges facing society. The position of Public Foodservices can be regarded both as a major purchaser of food and as a powerful ‘lever of communication’ which should be at the forefront of leading both industry and society to a healthier, more equitable and sustainable model, apparent in the types of being food purchased, and menus served.

However, EC’s research shows that governments, rather than prioritising food provided in Social Foodservice settings as an investment to support regional food economies, the health of citizens and the environment, are reducing budgets and cutting costs, which is resulting in more processed food and lower employment levels in the supply chain and in social services kitchens – it might be assumed with only rhetorical regard to the application of sustainable procurement strategies.

How food is produced, traded and consumed is strongly linked to consumer preference and demand, but the Eating City research demonstrates the increased use of manufactured ready prepared processed food has resulted in a loss jobs and deskilling with inadequate budgets allocated to feed children in schools, care homes and hospitals.

**Together to share a new vision of public food services**

Social Foodservices even where financial budgets are under pressure should be able to redesign menus and take procurement decisions that account for food in the round, rather than focusing on individual product costs in isolation. Eating City believes the 'treatment [of food] should be in the frame of 'Commons' rather than the 'commodification of food' and that Life Cycle Assessment methodology for food procurement (such as ISO 14040 or LM3), will support this.

### **A Responsibility of Government**

We all have responsibility for promoting a better food system, not least those responsible for the public sector.

Overall Social Foodservices are funded by governments and the EC PFS research revealed that about two thirds are directly delivered by inhouse operators employed directly by regional governments. The PFS focus group acknowledges that National, Regional and Municipal governments have a Public Health responsibility for their citizens of at least equal importance to maintaining infrastructure, planning and economic development. The research explains that in food there is the potential to 'link' these key objectives through menus and procurement practice.

The PFS Focus Group aims to highlight that the challenge for the EU food system is both economic and social. This is supported at EU level and is apparent in Sustainable and Green Public Procurement legislation, which seeks to capture better value for money and a multiple dividend for society. The EC PFS research shows the reality over many years is a simplistic and short-sighted year on year downward pressure on social foodservice catering costs caused by regional governments, rather than their adequately resourcing catering budgets.

Choosing a life-cycle costing approach takes into consideration a cost-benefit analysis of costs for production, loss of biodiversity, energy consumption, GHG emissions, health improvement and community benefits.

### **Costs**

A key barrier in the Foodservice sector is a widespread perception that moving to sustainable menu represents a financial risk. From experience, the PFS Focus Group believes that while it can, for instance, be more expensive for example to buy meat produced to higher welfare standards, buying less that is of better quality and refocussing menus on plant-based ingredients will, in reality, be cost neutral and should result in a lower operational food cost.

Importantly, food served in Social Foodservices should not be considered as just another commodity to procure by the public sector as it is for any other consumables. By its very nature food has the potential to influence our health, our environment and our economy. As a matter of principle the PFS Focus Group proposes that procurement and catering menus that are publicly funded should be the model of best practice readily apparent in sustainable food procurement and menus.

The impact of Foodservice providers continuing to produce menus that are not optimum for health and may be harmful to people and the environment, inevitably causes a downstream cost to governments that aim to maintain good population health and a viable environment and infrastructure.

Yet commonly, at a corporate fiscal level, there is a disassociation of costs related to health and the environment where budgets held by different institutions and by different governments departments. For example, such as health, economic development and regional planning will often operate in silos accountable only for their own budgetary expenditure. Food seldom appears as a key issue. Subsequently 'externality costs' arising from the food continuum and making medium and longer term 'preventative expenditure' is not considered in any holistic, encompassing way. A change to a more sustainable and healthier food system will therefore require positive action and a cultural shift in thinking by governments taking responsibility for a joined-up approach. This will require structural realignment. The scale of the multi-faceted problems associated with food, from climate change to obesity, requires this.

Equally important is that, if the profit driven commercial Foodservice world is to move, whether by a voluntary or moral consensus or mandated by legislation, toward a more sustainable food system both will require action to be initiated by Governments, it is unlikely to happen otherwise. Eating City PFS Group therefore believes governments actively engaging with industry on these issues are vital for a coordinated, incremental transition to a sustainable food system. The PFS agreed that this is part of our mission and vision - a move to "business for business" "businesses for people".

1. The PFS Group consider that there is a need to construct a set of concise and impactful, evidenced based narratives tailored for different audiences to support discussions with decision makers - at national political and policy level, at regional government level, and at a practitioner catering and procurement level.
2. That a further document would be helpful, to set out the key steps needed to transition a Social Foodservice to a more sustainable food system. This should also describe the operational and procurement good practice, financial benefits that are achievable and list the externalised costs that a sustainable food system is designed to mitigate by accounting for the effects of the industrialised food production process on health, effects on employment, communities and the environment.
3. Appealing food and menus in social foodservices that offer less red meat with greater use of fruit, vegetables, pulses and legumes is considered to be *the priority* but to implement this requires much more creativity, knowledge and understanding among caterers particularly, as well as consumers and producers.
4. Much of the catering industry and the food industry may continue to resist sustainable production and consumption until governments set clear health, environmental and educational targets for food that is required in its publicly funded institutions and this may be helped by legislation.

**Together to share a new vision of public food services**

## **A Digital Future**

The digital world is already impacting on Social Foodservices. In schools there are examples of online ordering Apps displacing school meals, this was considered a threat which would undermine the viability of a service that is predicated on serving a high percentage of a school's population. It was perceived that school meals, which we would define as primarily an education and health service, could lose the potential to positively contribute to the well-being and food education of young people.

Other examples such as cashless/credit card systems for school meals and online ordering in advance are helpful innovations for parents, pupils and for the internal management of schools. It was held that local authorities/governments should consider this as a matter requiring policy direction on several levels - from social cohesion to security allied with broader educational concern. It is not sound practice to allow young people to order meals and have them delivered to a place of education and that school food should be protected with the same integrity as teaching.

Block Chain technology and the use of QR labelling could potentially give consumers and buyers the choice to buy more sustainably and make our food system more sustainable from farm to fork and an issue to which the PFS Focus Group will return.

## **The Importance of Food Education, Training leading to Behaviour Change.**

Industrialisation of food has disconnected people from the food they eat. The PFS Focus Group believe that greater emphasis on food education in schools is essential to redress the loss of cooking skills and the prevailing preference for cheap processed high fat, salt and sugar foods that is fuelling obesity and pushing artisanal and local production to the margins.

Given this disconnection EC PFS Focus Group prioritise that food education in schools and wider public information is necessary to develop knowledgeable food consumers.

Public food served out of home in schools and other settings procurement can serve as a 'levers for change'. Broad food education should be mandatory in schools to progressively deepen knowledge and understanding of the 'monetary value of food and the values in food'.

Equally important is that Procurement Officers and Caterers also require training to understand how and why sustainable food is important. Without this understanding it is difficult to see how sustainable menus can be successfully introduced in schools, hospitals and elsewhere in Public Foodservice. Catering services that provide information on provenance can allow consumers to choose knowledgeably and confidently how they eat.

Governments should also work to create a responsible food production and manufacturing industry. All this may take at least a generation to deliver and underlines why the Eating City platform invests much its time and resources on young professionals who will become the future decision makers within the food system.

## **Local and Global**

Our food system is uniquely important. As a society, we rely on food producers, food preparation and food distributors every day to feed us and provide the nutrients and well-being that we can receive from eating. Short supply chains develop a sense of place which if linked to regional food, benefits the regional economy, employment, environment and health.

The PFS Focus Group agrees that a sustainable food system is made up of environmental concerns, economic impact and social benefits. There are sensible trade-offs between these in any procurement that analyses the cost of food sourced globally compared to the often higher costs of locally produced food. The aim is to produce a multiple dividend through public expenditure.

The overriding concern for governments, caterers and in procurement is to take into account the relationship between these social, environmental and economic priorities. Thus, not all that is locally produced is best value and what is globally sourced may be on balance better overall. The PFS Focus Group endorse the Eating City vision which recognises this is a pragmatic reality to be accounted for and advocates a 'whole life costing' or LCA methodology.

At the same time the research and PFS group recognised that we live in a globalised food system, with food travelling long often unnecessary distances often supplying into food manufacturing to create more processed food. Global food brands are becoming increasingly dominant to the detriment of local food production with short supply chains that support regional economies and vulnerable rural economies.

## **The Importance of Menus and Procurement Strategy**

In Social Foodservice it is menu design that drives the demand. Sustainable menus that are based on short supply chains benefit the regional economy. Caterers and Cooks are an essential part of this system, and in schools and hospitals, they can drive the demand for healthier sustainable food through menus. This is vitally important not least because Social Foodservices feed young agile minds as well as the most vulnerable parts of society where a healthy diet is nothing less than imperative. Procurements that require freshness can be used to support shorter and more resilient supply chains that reflect food that is, or could be produced, in the region. An alliance with the food and drink industry, by establishing shared objectives with food producers and the Foodservice Industry for healthier and more sustainably produced food is considered vitally important. It was accepted that industry will only respond at scale if there is a business opportunity to be secured with a predictable demand.

At the same the PFS Focus Group believe that we should be realistic about the capacity and interest in Social Foodservice market. Regional micro and SME producers have higher fixed costs than foodservice manufacturers, distributors and wholesalers that must be passed on in order to survive in business. This is worthwhile to ensure that there is a competitive

supply base and diversity of food supply which otherwise will be concentrated in the hands of large producers and distributors.

All parts of Europe require a thriving and competitive food and drink industry, but public procurement is regarded as too bureaucratic for local producers, with complex distribution offering by low margins (as a result of reducing catering/food budgets imposed by local governments) and therefore often beyond the scale, capacity and business ambition of most. This must be addressed, and local and regional governments must encourage greater local SME participation. This is achievable by using a sustainable procurement methodology.

### **Special Diets, Demographics, Religion and Immigration**

The PFS Group acknowledged the important catering challenges surrounding such as demographics, religious diets and immigration and that in Social Foodservices is both a challenge and an opportunity. The PFS Focus Group acknowledges the paper by Bossi, Giorda, and Messina for Eating City, 2014 - *Food and Religions (in public foodservices)* which explored guidelines for improving food selection and menu patterns with references to food beliefs and religion, and through it the health status of children.

Though not explicit in the paper, it is a reasonable conclusion to take from this that an inclusive community representation model for menus would tend toward a sustainable diet where culturally appropriate food for students with religious dietary restrictions for instance scale back pork and beef and increase plant based vegetarian options on menus.

### **The Role of Civil Society**

Civil Society Organisations (CSO) have a vital role to play to create momentum toward a more sustainable food system. CSOs can develop grass roots knowledge to support understanding leading to behaviour change and build and upward pressure to demand of governments, industry and Foodservice industry; healthier, safe and less processed food. Changing the food system must be a movement from bottom up as well as top down.

### **Conclusion**

Evidence increasingly supports the idea that healthy food is most often sustainable as well and vice versa. A paradigm shift to a wholly normative healthy and sustainable diet should be expected and demanded of local and national governments.

Governments should work to create a responsible industry and develop knowledgeable food consumers. This may take at least a generation to deliver and underlines why the Eating City platform mission is to invest in young professionals who will become the future decision makers within the food system.

Eating City has identified public food in hospitals, schools and elsewhere as a priority, and considers their work should be exemplary. However, if public food is viewed in a low-cost culture it is destined to underperform and decline in its inherent value to society.

Public food therefore should be the exemplar of sustainability, and particularly school food, regarded as an health and education service and an investment that is part of a broad (food) education in schools, there to equip our current and future generations towards a more healthy, innovative, resilient and secure future. Social Food Service is not per se a commercial enterprise though it must perform to rigorous commercial disciplines.

Increasing use of manufactured processed food is resulting both in a loss of appreciation of the value of food, a loss of food preparation skills in the population and employment in the agri-food chain.

Many foodservice companies are only partially aware of the effects of climate change on food systems, and the likely knock-on pressures for their business. Instead, they are operating on a short-term agenda of offering value for money, cutting margins and driving prices down. A focus on price can encourage efficient operations, but it should not be to the detriment of social progress for sustainability.

Thus, the Eating City vision challenges the notion of 'business for businesses to one of 'business for people'. The role of civil society, public procurement and catering as a catalyst for this is destined to be at the heart of Eating City's future work.