



COPENHAGEN DENMARK

Title of Practice

COPENHAGEN: ORGANIC CONVERSION IN PUBLIC KITCHENS

Milan Urban Food Policy Pact Category

SUSTAINABLE DIETS AND NUTRITION



Main impacts on other MUFPP categories



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Context

Although the sheer tonnage of the food that is procured by the Municipality of Copenhagen is small compared to private food consumption, the difference when it comes to public spending is that it is controlled by the public elected officials and can thus be potentially directed toward more sustainable choices compared to private consumption. The possibility for a municipality to **pursue sustainability goals through public spending** might seem obvious, but still the examples of cities that have pursued an ambitious agenda are few and far between. The reason for this is that a cultural and vocational change is needed to re-focus a city's entire food system, which cannot be achieved by decree. Many kitchens have stopped actually cooking and resort to heating frozen, processed food, and many cooks, especially in the public sphere, are lacking in the basic cooking skills needed to transform raw ingredients into nutritious and enjoyable meals. For this reason, the Municipality of Copenhagen has challenged itself with the **aim of achieving 90 percent organic ingredients** across the entire city's public food system. This provides the structure and framework for a small, kitchen-sized revolution to bring real food, real cooking and the professional pride of cooks back to the forefront.

Overview of the food practice

The **Organic Conversion policy** and the target of going from 45 to 90 percent in nine years was instituted by the City Council as a part of Copenhagen's sustainability strategy. The goals included **securing clean drinking water** for the citizens of Copenhagen, since many water sources in Denmark are contaminated with pesticides, as well as strengthening the market for organic and sustainable food in general, through the capital city's yearly spending on food. The 90 percent organic strategy has been a dual effort of both **training kitchen staff** and simultaneously **restructuring the methods of procurement** to ensure supply of quality organic ingredients.

The organic conversion of all approximately 900 kitchens across the city has been undertaken both by departments within the municipality and with the help of various consultants and trainers, by spending around EUR 6 million for knowledge, education and counseling. The main idea behind the strategy in the kitchens is to train kitchen staff in **cooking techniques**, so that they are able to plan their menus sustainably and cook food from scratch, as opposed to using processed food and semi-fabricates. Other techniques that are taught include the increased use of seasonal vegetables, reduced use of meat, baking, preserving, fermenting and a general reduction of food waste. All of these aspects serve to maximize the value of public food spending budgets, while also resulting in more nutritious, climate friendly and appealing meals. No kitchens have

been awarded an increased budget in order to achieve the goal of 90 percent organic; the task has been to **convert within existing budgets**.

In recent years, the Municipality has put much effort into ensuring that the organic transition in the kitchens will be supported by quality, organic procurement and tenders that encourage the market to develop the organic and sustainable parts of their product ranges. As a direct result, recent years have seen a **professionalization of the organic supply lines into the canteens, schools, hospitals and nursing homes**, where it is now possible to get a wide range of organic products in catering sizes, freshly butchered organic meat in a wide variety of cuts and a wide diversity in the offering of seasonal fruits and vegetables. The market for organic and sustainable food in catering in Denmark has developed much more slowly than the retail market, but the procurement officers of Copenhagen have been able to create a clear and concise demand and communicate it effectively to the contenders in the marketplace.

Results and lessons learned

In 2016, public organic procurement in Copenhagen reached an average of 88 percent of the 80 000 meals served each day. It means that about 141.800 kg of organic food are served weekly, with a total yearly budget of EUR 40.3 million. The impact in terms of sustainability is hard to quantify. However, according to the calculation model employed by Organic Denmark, the modest appraisal of the municipality's consumption of organic milk on a yearly basis shows a saving of approximately 370.82 million of litres of ground water from being contaminated with pesticides. Other **environmental aspects**, such as increased biodiversity, improved animal welfare and decrease of chemical fertilizers are indirect benefits. The impact that the Organic Conversion Program has had on the Danish foodservice market is also difficult to quantify. However, it is noted that the organic food service market is experiencing explosive growth in recent years: the total turnover in organic food service has tripled since 2009.

The innovative aspect of the organic food policy in Copenhagen is represented by a **novel approach to public food procurement**, aimed at raising the quality of public food through a broad set of initiatives. Working systematically towards **raising the skill level** and status of the public kitchen staff across a capital the size of Copenhagen is not easily accomplished. The process has taken many years and required both the assistance of several different external consultants as well as extended determination among the city's employees. The Program also benefited from the **involvement of thousands of stakeholders**: the whole approach in Copenhagen, from changes in diets and meal culture to changes in procurement, depends entirely on inclusion. Changing the menus and reducing the amount of meat that is being served, for instance, cannot be done without the support of not only the kitchen staff, but the rest of the employees and management as well. Anyone who has experience in developing public tenders knows that a contract is only ever as good as the end-users perceive it to be, and those who are wise include as many of those end-users in the process as it is possible. But inclusion in Copenhagen reaches beyond the limits of the Municipality, and a wide network of wholesalers, producers and non governmental organizations is further helping achieve sustainable development.



- <http://okologi.dk/grundvand>
- <http://okologi.dk/virksomhed/foodservice/hjaelp-til-omlaegning/statistik-og-markedsdata>



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