

Nutrition, health and climate: What have we learned so far?

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Abstract

Food and meals are central elements in our lives: a source of pleasure, a social activity and a bearer of culture. Our eating habits are also very important to health, which implies that the organization and content of meals is a prerequisite for well-being and learning. Schools, in particular, have unique opportunities to promote healthy lifestyles, help develop good eating habits and raise environmental and climate awareness among children and youths by embedding food in a wider context. Unsurprisingly, there is also an increasing interest in school meals and food-related education among researchers, many of whom agree that the quality of school meals can be seen as one of the most accurate indicators of the cities' sustainability potential. Systematic quality work, however, requires shared targets and ambitions, regular quality checks and discussions on development and improvement. In that vein, the City of Gothenburg has launched the project Urban Rural Gothenburg¹, which assembles, develops, tests and implements new solutions for the city's public kitchens. This involves climate-smart and environmentally sound perspectives and programs regarding meal planning, food procurement, food preparation and food-related teaching and learning. One important approach deals with the normalization of increased vegetarian consumption and greater awareness of food's origins and travel from farm to table. Another approach deals with conscious choices of food that are beneficial for both the environment and health. A third notable approach focuses on new ways of handling food waste to reduce climate impact. In line with the third Sustainable Development Goal, this presentation captures and reaffirms the fundamental assumptions and methods involved in Gothenburg's work with food sustainability in public kitchens, with an emphasis on health and climate as cross-cutting issues that matter to us all.

Keywords

food, sustainable meals, school meals, public kitchens, farm-to-fork, health, well-being, Gothenburg

¹ Urban Rural Gothenburg' is a three-year (2017-19) EU-sponsored project for sustainable development with the overarching aim to create improved conditions for green innovation and green business development between the city and the countryside. Operating in five testbeds in four local hubs in north-eastern Gothenburg, the project seeks to develop and implement new low-carbon approaches to local development, with particular linkages to food, logistics, tourism, and ecological business models. By using co-creative methodologies (the so-called 'penta-helix model'), 'Urban Rural Gothenburg' aims to contribute to the fulfillment of Gothenburg's 2017 sustainability goals. This involves combining innovations for social improvement with a reduction of environmental and climate impact to become a sustainable city of globally and locally equitable emissions. 'Urban Rural Gothenburg' is funded partly by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) via The Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (Tillväxtverket) and is led by Business Region Göteborg (BRG) in collaboration with seven other municipal units as partners and co-financers. The project targets primarily small- and medium-sized enterprises by making use of the local communities in north-eastern Gothenburg and their socio-economic potential to transition into a more sustainable society. The targeted companies involve food producers, conveyors and logisticians, distributors, marketing, communications and IT specialists, stores and local markets, restaurants, hotels and other tourism-related businesses, as well as recycling and knowledge enterprises. In other words, 'Urban Rural Gothenburg' is meant to serve as an accelerator for circular economies and green business development with a strong local anchoring.