



For a proactive European food policy, let's free up public procurement and put the European sustainable food system law back on the agenda !

In 2023, several networks worked collectively within the Buy Better Food Coalition to build a European approach to food. The BBF Coalition recognizes the key role of local authorities and public catering in supporting agricultural and food systems that promote healthy food, fair remuneration and decent working conditions for farmers, support for small-scale production and sustainable farming and consumption practices.

In January 2024, the networks France urbaine, Agores, the Lascaux Center for Transitions, the cities of Brussels and Mouans Sartoux, Eating City and MangerDemain (Wallonie) made up of legal and catering experts, local elected representatives, are going further. We aim to modernize the european public procurement framework.

Our proposal is based on strong evidence based facts :

The food and farming system is vulnerable throughout Europe. A great proportion of farmers are due to retire in the coming years. Sanitary, geopolitical and climatic crises highlight the fragility of our supply chains, and underline the importance of collective strategies for adapting to climate change and reducing the loss of biodiversity ;

Fostering local food systems and supporting the more sustainable practices helps to increasing our environmental and geopolitical resilience ; planning the use of scarce resources, notably biomass and water, requires a local approach ;

Local authorities play a key role through public catering, public procurement and land planning,

However, while it is legal under European law to set up a renewable energy community in a given area as part of a local supply strategy, similar practices are not authorized in the field of public catering. Public purchasing cannot be directly included as part of a more global territorial food strategy.

Adding more and more criteria and requirements, introducing complex specifications cannot be the only response : in Dijon, dividing contract in smaller parts to address small farmers requires specific technical skills ; in Rennes, while efforts are made to protect water resources, the model remains complex ; in Brussels, only one bidder was able to respond to a call for tenders : a wholesaler offering apples from New Zealand... In such bids "short supply chain" criteria do not imply short-distance supply. Local authorities have deployed inventive solutions all over Europe. It's not enough. Given the urgency of the situation, we must support these initiatives, which are helping to strengthen the supply chains at a local scale, and go further.

We hereby support the following proposals :

- **Public procurement must meet the challenges of food security and territorial resilience, and thus support the European agricultural resilience ;**
- **Public purchasers must be free to choose the procedure for 50% of the annual volume of purchases, provided that they have established the needs of the region (restoration of biodiversity, soil and water quality restoration, crop diversification, supply security, payment for ecosystem services...) within a diagnosis built with local stakeholders,**
- **These proposals must be included in the European sustainable food system law, which we hope will be put on the agenda soon.**

Through this statement we wish to affirm :

- that access to sustainable, healthy food for all can be a unifying objective for the European Union, helping to achieve an "ever closer union among peoples";
- that we're not defending the local for its own sake, but the key role of local food systems to strengthen territorial resilience for the benefit of all European citizens and farmers ;
- that our proposal complies with the fundamental principles of the internal market as clarified by case law, in particular: the notion of "economically" most advantageous offer, the principles of transparency and publicity of procedures and the principle of non-discrimination.