

Top tips for school food and catering services



The quality of the food and drink our children and young people consume at school, and the manner in which it is bought, delivered and served, should be key priorities for schools, local authorities, pupils and their families alike.

What schools, local authorities and caterers buy in terms of school food is important (for example, avoiding unsustainably harvested fish species), but decisions about when it is purchased, who it is bought from, how it is packaged, distributed and prepared and how waste is managed can make an important contribution by a school to sustainable development.

There are many steps we can take, both small and large, that can have a positive and significant effect on the sustainability of the school food system. Many of these will also have a positive effect upon school budgets as in many cases efficiency and sustainability can be pursued in tandem.

The following tips are designed to help you deliver a more sustainable and also more efficient food supply chain.



1

Where possible, align your menus with seasonal production/harvesting cycles

- Seasonal food tends to be cheaper, and has lower environmental production costs than non-seasonal food. Download the School Food Trust's seasonality chart www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk/resources/seasonalitychart
- Buying food and drink when in season, and unprocessed or lightly processed food, is likely to mean that less energy has been used in its production.
- Work with your suppliers to identify seasonal cost trends and take advantage of low season prices for meat and poultry.

2

Use the power of aggregated and collaborative purchasing to ensure that sustainable options are provided

- Encourage local/regional food suppliers to bid for your business. Work with suppliers to increase the proportion of local/regional produce they offer and reduce the number of deliveries you receive.
- Work with other local schools to explore joint purchasing and delivery arrangements and/or buy into local authority contracts, taking care to ensure product ranges and delivery arrangements are harmonised. Making your service more efficient will improve its sustainability. See *A fresh look at school food procurement – efficiency and sustainability* at www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk/doc_item.asp?DocId=79&DocCatId=9

- Use the DCSF OPEN e-procurement system for schools to access nationally negotiated contracts where these provide value for money and sustainable products. See www.dcsf.gov.uk/open

3

Consider increasing the proportion of certified/assured products and sustainably-sourced fish in your food supply chain

- Avoid using over-exploited fish stocks and ensure fish does not appear on the menu during the breeding season. See www.fishonline.org for a handy quick reference tool on which fish to use or avoid.
- Ask food suppliers to provide pricing information for standard, assured, fairly-traded and organically certified products to give your school both flexibility and choice. See *Integrating sustainable development into public procurement of food and catering* at www.defra.gov.uk/farm/policy/sustain/procurement/pdf/psfpi-faqs.pdf

4

Seek opportunities to reduce food and packaging waste, and where waste is unavoidable, try to ensure it is recycled or re-used rather than just dumped.

- Monitor both volume and origin of waste.
- Regularly review food waste arising from unused or spoilt kitchen stock or uneaten food and take steps to reduce this, e.g. better menu planning to avoid over ordering and avoiding the use of unpopular options.

› An estimated £1.2 billion is spent on school food annually.

- Liaise with your Local Authority's waste management and environment officers and take part in local recycling schemes or initiatives to divert waste to productive end uses.
- Segregate your waste into categories which can be recycled. Mixed waste tends to go to landfill.
- Waste products such as cooking oil, cardboard and aluminium all have a commercial value. You should be able to find collectors who will take this from you for minimal or no cost.
- Encourage suppliers to reduce packaging waste and make them liable for responsible disposal as a condition of contract. See *A Bursar's Guide to Sustainable Schools* www.teachernet.gov.uk/sustainableschools

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Promote more energy and water efficient practices in your school

- When buying new kitchen equipment choose products with the highest energy efficiency rating, where they apply use the European Energy or Energy Saving Recommended labels. Fridges and freezers are the main users of energy in a kitchen so they should be your priority.
- A range of low cost energy and water efficient devices exist which are appropriate for fitting to existing equipment, including fridges and freezers. You can find information about some of these products at www.defra.gov.uk/environment/consumerprod/index.htm

- Encourage catering staff to give more thought to energy and water efficiency; simple changes in kitchen behaviour can be even more effective than new technology. As a starting point put up posters based on the School Food Trust top tips.
- Good maintenance and the appropriate use and positioning of equipment is vital, see A Bursar's Guide to Sustainable Schools at www.teachernet.gov.uk/sustainable-schools and also visit www.sustainablelearning.info

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Develop an environmental management system (EMS) and improve your environmental efficiency

- This will help you to implement and monitor your progress in a systematic way and will provide your pupils with evidence of positive change. The Eco-Schools scheme is an example of a simple EMS designed for schools (www.eco-schools.org.uk); similarly Groundwork's One World School approach. For advice and support on local government approaches see www.defra.gov.uk/sustainable/government/advice/local/index.htm
- Establish a school food policy statement covering food and catering services – see the National Governors Association's guidance on food policy at www.defra.gov.uk/farm/policy/sustain/procurement/pdf/food-policy-schools.pdf. The policy statement is key to a successful environmental management system.

Review the use of chemicals in your kitchens/dining rooms, use environmentally benign cleaning products and find opportunities to reduce packaging waste by using refillable containers.

www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk/doc_item.asp?DocId=79&DocCatId=9

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/gpp/index_en.htm

7

Drink tap water

Tap water in the UK is clean, cheap and comes with no packaging problems.

- Encourage staff and pupils to drink water from the tap, making jugs of tap water available at mealtimes and in classrooms for younger children.
- Encourage children to bring refillable bottles for personal water consumption
- Discourage the use of bought bottled water – not only a costly option but leaves you with a waste problem

8

Try growing food to help pupils understand where foods come from

Food growing can teach pupils about the lifecycles of the vegetables, the creatures attracted to the garden and about soil and nutrition. A vegetable plot can raise pupils' awareness of the seasonal nature of food and its immense variety.

- Involve pupils in the decision-making process – if they take ownership of the project, it can help to make the whole experience a more positive one for all concerned.
- An area for growing vegetables can be created in a garden of any size, from a large, sunny vegetable plot, to a few containers on a patio. It is best to choose vegetables that are easy to grow, reliable and quick to crop. Ideally they should be ones that children like to eat!
- Explore a range of curriculum subjects, including: researching which vegetables grow and when to plant and harvest (ICT); investigating soil conditions and microclimate (geography); crop rotation and pest and disease control (science); and building pest barriers and traps (design technology).
- Visit www.growingschools.org.uk for more information about the Growing Schools initiative, designed to support teachers in using the 'outdoor classroom' as a resource across the curriculum for pupils of all ages. Other initiatives can support school garden projects too like the RHS' Campaign for School Gardening (www.rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening).

› Whilst more energy efficient equipment can be expensive, when the cost of operating it over its working life is considered, the new equipment is likely to be economically advantageous.

Take pupils to visit a farm

- Think about your visit carefully and make sure you have clear learning objectives. The new Learning Outside the Classroom website (www.lotc.org.uk) will help you with this.
- Talk to the pupils about the different types of animals they might see, the machinery that may be around and how they should behave. Make sure they understand how this relates to what they are learning in the classroom.
- Allow pupils to research an area of activity that would be available on the farm before they go. Find out what pupils are learning in other subjects beforehand to make connections.
- Discuss with the farmer the best way to help pupils learn all aspects of processes if all cannot be seen in one day.
- Visit www.growingschools.org.uk and www.thinkfoodandfarming.org.uk to discover local farms to visit (including City Farms) and for further teaching resources.

IF YOU DO ONLY ONE THING TO MAKE YOUR SCHOOL FOOD SERVICE MORE SUSTAINABLE AND REDUCE CARBON EMISSIONS, ALIGN YOUR MENUS WITH SEASONAL PRODUCTION AND HARVESTING CYCLES.



A split door seal on an oven can lose 20% of the oven's heat.

Sources of further information

The School Food Trust has produced guidance on many school food-related issues. Its guidance and website contain many case studies illustrating how schools have put sustainable food-related activities into practice; see www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk

Regional Improvement and Efficiency Centres (RIEPs) have been established to help schools and local authorities achieve savings. Some RIEPs have specialists that can advise on catering, procurement and sustainability issues. See www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pagelid=18437

DCSF's Education Procurement Centre works across the schools sector to promote and support more sustainable procurement practices and effective contract management; is also responsible for the OPEN e-procurement system. See www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/epc

Public Sector Food Procurement Initiative (PSFPI) Advice on the availability of regionally produced food is available from your region's PSFPI contact – see www.defra.gov.uk/farm/policy/sustain/procurement/pdf/psfpi-contacts.pdf

Food for Life Partnership, run by the Soil Association, operates an award scheme for school caterers to get recognition for their use of seasonal, local and organic ingredients, high welfare meat and sustainable fish; see www.foodforlife.org.uk

Fish and Kids is a Marine Stewardship Council project providing class and web based activities to help children learn about sustainable fishing and related issues; see www.fishandkids.org

Waste Resources Action Programme (WRAP) has a programme of work to help schools improve recycling; see www.wrap.org.uk

The Energy Technology List website www.eca.gov.uk describes an allowance that can be claimed for energy efficient equipment and provides information about the scheme, an eligible products list and performance criteria for each item. It also explains how to claim Enhanced Capital Allowances.

Fair and ethical trading for further information see www.fairtrade.org.uk/schools and www.ogc.gov.uk/documents/guidance_on_Fair_and_ethical_trading.pdf

The Carbon Trust provides guidance on efficient management of refrigeration – see www.carbontrust.co.uk/energy/startsaving/tech_refrigeration_maintenance.htm

Sustainable Consumption Round Table prepared *Double Dividend: Promoting good nutrition and sustainable consumption through healthy school meals*; www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications.php?id=289

➤ Food waste production can be reduced by as much as 20% in many schools, often with little or no capital investment.



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