

# Policy proposals for a sustainable urban food system in the Municipality of Thessaloniki

FOOD POLICY COUNCIL OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF THESSALONIKI

Sustainable Food Thess 1.0

The following policy document concerns the food policy of the Municipality of Thessaloniki. It was developed through a participatory process by the Food Policy Council of the Municipality of Thessaloniki, in the framework of the Food Trails Horizon 2020 project and in cooperation with local stakeholders and local experts from a variety of scientific fields, active in the field of nutrition.

The food policy sets the foundations and the framework for the implementation of a broader interdisciplinary and participatory strategy in the fields of food and nutrition, which exploits and focuses on the geographical, historical, social, cultural and other local specificities of Thessaloniki.



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## **Policy axis 1: Food production and distribution**

Food production and distribution is the first and most important axis of any urban food policy. The place and the way in which the food products are consumed by urban households largely determine both the qualitative characteristics and the ecological footprint of urban food.

The transformation of agri-food products into commodities produced on an industrial scale and traded on a global scale has resulted in a significant deterioration of nutritional value, increased food insecurity, environmental burden and increased ecological footprint of urban food.

To counteract these negative effects, European policies focusing on nutrition ([one health](#), [farm to fork strategy](#)) aim to make food supply chains shorter, promoting the reconnection of urban consumers with peri-urban producers.

### **Policy proposal 1a: Supporting local producers in the peri-urban countryside**

At the heart of agri-food production are local producers in the peri-urban countryside. In order to achieve shorter food supply chains, local producers should be supported so that small multifunctional farms that do not rely on economies of scale (intensive and extensive production) become competitive and sustainable.

At the same time as supporting local producers, efforts to preserve the genetic material of local varieties of cultivated plants should be strengthened. These efforts, in addition to the general contribution to the conservation of biodiversity, are also aimed at preserving the gene pool of local varieties, which are characterized by a high degree of adaptability to local soil and climatic conditions.

Supporting peri-urban rural producers also includes the activation and empowerment of young unemployed people who wish to become active in the primary sector, making use of underutilized agricultural land.

The design of appropriate actions and interventions to support local producers requires mapping, networking and cooperation with the collective bodies and producer groups, active in the peri-urban countryside of Thessaloniki and the

Food Policy Council is the most appropriate tool for networking and collaboration.

### **Policy proposal 1b: Strengthening alternative agri-food networks linking producers and consumers**

In order to achieve the interconnection of local producers with consumers (households and businesses), the alternative agri-food networks of the city of Thessaloniki should be strengthened and expanded. Alternative agri-food networks are defined as networks that constitute short food supply chains, linking producers directly to consumers without the intervention of intermediaries.

Such agri-food networks include farmers' markets, Socially Supported Agriculture (SSA) projects, producer-consumer cooperatives and various festivals and celebrations of ecological agriculture and livestock farming.

### **Policy proposal 1c: Promoting urban agriculture and food self-production**

The promotion and expansion of urban and peri-urban agriculture in its various forms, including but not limited to the urban vegetable gardens, planted beds, urban vineyards and orchards, edible parks and tree-lined streets, contributes to the increase of urban greening, which in turn contributes to achieving climate neutrality, addressing the urban heat island and adapting to climate change. To this end, it is useful to record and make use of all available public and private public spaces (e.g. open spaces, building forecourts, etc.).

Apart from the above positive impacts, urban agriculture contributes to the information, awareness and education of urban consumers about the process of self-production (cultivation and processing) of food and improves the access of vulnerable social groups to quality agri-food products.

### **Policy proposal 1d: Green food procurement contracts**

The Municipality of Thessaloniki procures large quantities of fresh and packaged food, as well as ready meals for the needs of its social structures and services. The food supplies mainly concern the basic goods structures (Social Grocery and Soup Kitchen), the program of material assistance to the needy financed by the Food Aid for the Needy (TEBA) and the supply of the Municipality of Thessaloniki's nurseries.

At the same time, the School Committees of Primary and Secondary Education, which are legal entities supervised by the Municipality of Thessaloniki, are responsible for the leasing of school canteens in the school complexes of the Municipality of Thessaloniki.

The potential of the existing legislative framework for public procurement should be exploited in order to integrate the elements of local and ecological production and distribution, which are components of sustainable food and sustainable food systems, into the specifications of the food to be procured.

Simultaneously, we should identify the obstacles that the current legislative framework poses to the incorporation of the above elements into the quality specifications of the food products being supplied and launch public advocacy actions to change them.

## **Policy axis 2: Healthy diets, eating habits, dietary habits, nutritional habits and eating disorders**

Informing, raising awareness and activating the wider social environment and all local stakeholders and interested parties on the contribution of nutrition to development and health maintenance, focusing on the [Mediterranean dietary](#) pattern, sustainable nutrition, sustainable food systems and wider nutritional issues, are very important components of urban nutrition policy.

The intensive pace of modern life in urban metropolises tends to alienate city dwellers from the place and the way in which the food they consume is produced. We must put food back in its rightful place in order to reap the benefits both for the health and quality of life of citizens and for the urban and peri-urban environment.

Nutrition is directly linked to public health. For example, obesity is a major threat to public health and affects a significant proportion of the population of Thessaloniki. Awareness of the disease of obesity and its destigmatisation is a priority of the nutrition policy.

Urban food policy should include partnerships at the local level that aim to raise the profile of nutrition-related issues both in the public discourse and in citizens' consciousness, focusing on issues of sustainability, dietary patterns, nutritional specificities and eating disorders.

### **Policy proposal 2a: Changing the dietary patterns of school-age children**

According to modern findings, good eating habits acquired from childhood are very important in maintaining health in adulthood. Childhood obesity has reached epidemic proportions in the Western world and in Greece in recent decades and has become a major public health problem. The implementation of prevention policies, especially in schools and in the family, can make a substantial contribution to reducing the problem.

Children's diet, especially during childhood, when the foundations of a healthy diet are laid, is heavily influenced by the eating habits of their parents and the place where they live.

The design of actions and interventions should be participatory and in collaboration with the school community (parents, teachers, students) and other local stakeholders, while, in order to maximise effectiveness, actions and interventions should be based on experiential education.



### **Policy proposal 2c: Recognition and promotion of nutritional particularities in cooperation with all local stakeholders**

A number of health reasons and specific ideological or religious beliefs require a significant number of people to follow certain dietary habits and dietary restrictions.

The recognition and promotion of dietary particularities due to health reasons (diseases, food allergies, intolerances, etc.) or ideological and religious beliefs is an important first step, in cooperation with the local catering sector and other bodies (hospitals, student clubs, nurseries, school canteens, etc.), that provide food, to take these particularities into consideration in the provision of meals and to improve the quality of life of people with specific dietary restrictions.

### **Policy proposal 2d: Highlight and address eating disorders in cooperation with all local stakeholders**

Eating disorders are defined as disorders that include both organic and functional pathological changes that result in weight gain or weight loss. Among these, the most basic and frequent disorder is obesity. However, in addition to disorders that result in weight gain, those that result in an obsessive attempt to reduce weight, such as anorexia nervosa, are also included. There are also some less common eating disorders such as bulimia nervosa, binge eating disorder, nocturnal overeating syndrome and others.

Identifying and highlighting eating disorders is the first step to design actions and interventions for their prevention and treatment in cooperation with local stakeholders.

### **Policy axis 3: Tackling food loss and waste and social nutrition interventions**

Food loss and waste are phenomena that characterize modern Western societies of abundance. In Europe alone, it is estimated that several tens of millions of tons of food suitable for consumption are discarded every year, while on a global scale, food loss and waste is estimated to amount to about 1/3 of global food production.

Food loss and waste has a number of negative consequences both in terms of resource management (monetary, material and energy) and waste, and in terms of the malnutrition that plagues socially vulnerable groups even within economically developed Western societies.

Policies aimed at reducing food loss and waste can address these negative consequences by focusing on the proper management of food surpluses for the benefit of our economically vulnerable citizens.

#### **Policy proposal 3a: Tackling food waste by utilizing the leftovers of the Thessaloniki Central Market and the farmers' markets**

In order to tackle food waste, it is important to cooperate with the bodies involved in the distribution of large quantities of perishable agri-food (agricultural and livestock) products, such as the Central Market of Thessaloniki (wholesale) and the farmers' markets (retail) of Thessaloniki.

Cooperation with the above-mentioned bodies is crucial for the recording and proper management of residues, in order to avoid the disposal of food that can be used in the context of the circular economy, to feed economically and socially vulnerable groups.

#### **Policy proposal 3b: Tackling food waste by using surplus food from the catering and hotel sector and raising consumer awareness**

In order to tackle food waste, it is also important to cooperate with other strategic partners such as catering businesses (restaurants, hotels, bakeries, etc.) and organizations that provide food (student clubs, hospitals, etc.) in the form of ready meals.

Cooperation with these bodies is equally crucial to record and properly manage surpluses in order to avoid the disposal of food that can be used to feed economically and socially vulnerable groups.

Another important aspect of tackling food waste is to inform and raise awareness among consumers themselves, so as to reduce the waste recorded at household level through the rational supply of food.

### **Policy proposal 3c: Tackling food loss by using the surplus production of peri-urban rural producers**

In addition to food waste, food loss is also an important issue, usually in the form of surplus production of agri-food products that, for reasons of low commercial value, are not harvested or are harvested but not sold by producers.

Finding ways to use surplus agricultural production, in cooperation with peri-urban producers, is important in the effort to address food loss.

### **Policy proposal 3d: Interconnecting and strengthening soup kitchen operations and designing a supply chain for the use of food waste and surplus**

An important aspect of sustainable urban nutrition is the social dimension of nutrition, which means ensuring adequate and quality food for all citizens, regardless of their socio-economic background.

The strengthening and support of social soup kitchens (social plate, social kitchens, solidarity kitchens, etc.) should be a priority of any urban food policy.

An important way to support the above-mentioned projects, which at the same time contributes to tackling food loss and waste, is the use of surplus and leftover food to feed these projects.

The design and implementation of interventions for the operation of a supply chain that, with the help of new technologies and the mobilization and activation of volunteers and CSOs, will facilitate the utilization of surplus food for the supply of social soup kitchens, should be a priority of the urban food policy of the Municipality of Thessaloniki.

#### **Policy axis 4: Design and promotion of the city's gastronomic identity**

For centuries, Thessaloniki has been a crossroads of flavors, where different cultures, religions and other cultural influences have created a rich culinary tradition. This tradition is a version of the “Mediterranean Diet” which has been included in the representative list of UNESCO's “Intangible Cultural Heritage”.

The strengthening of the emotional and experiential relationship of residents and visitors with the city's gastronomic history and culture, the promotion of the city's gastronomic identity from an anthropological, sociological and historical point of view, and its utilization as a factor in strengthening sustainable and resilient local development, through the enrichment and diversification of the tourist product of the Municipality of Thessaloniki, should be an element of urban food policy.

#### **Policy proposal 4a: Recognition of local gastronomy as a factor in enhancing sustainable and resilient local development**

Before proceeding with the reconstruction and promotion of the city's gastronomic identity, it is important to recognize local gastronomy as a factor that promotes and supports sustainable and resilient development.

The recognition and promotion of the gastronomic identity as an element that contributes to the enrichment and differentiation of the tourist product offered by the city to its visitors should be shared among all tourism stakeholders.

The promotion of gastronomy as an important component of the city's tourism product requires the cooperation of all stakeholders involved in tourism and gastronomy. The Food Policy Council of the Municipality of Thessaloniki could potentially become the appropriate platform for the networking and cooperation of the above mentioned stakeholders.

#### **Policy Proposal 4b: Recording and exploiting the historical memory, cultural heritage and local gastronomic culture of the inhabitants in order to strengthen the gastronomic identity of the city**

The different foodways of a place can serve as a powerful vehicle for the transmission of deep-rooted concepts that express and reflect the uniqueness of that place. In this way, food contributes to people's experiential and emotional connection with the city they live in or visit. In order to strengthen this relationship, the city's rich gastronomic culture, rooted in its long past, should be documented. The collection of oral and written sources on local recipes, local products, food customs and traditions, in order to highlight the symbolic value of local cuisine and the social and cultural dimension of food, is important for achieving the above goal.

In addition to documenting the rich and long gastronomic heritage and gastronomic culture of the city, which is rooted in the rich cultural tradition and the city's long past, the gastronomic culture that comes from the modern composition of its rich and diverse population should be exploited.

**Policy proposal 4c: Work with the creative community and design bodies for the participatory design of the city's gastronomic identity**

In order to design the city's gastronomic identity through a participatory process, the activation of the city's creative community and the cooperation with the bodies involved in the design of products, services and processes is required.

In order for this cooperation to produce tangible results in a globalised and competitive tourism market, stakeholders should cooperate both at strategic and operational level and set specific objectives monitored by specific result indicators.

**Policy proposal 4d: Exploit local gastronomy festivals and international networking and promote participation in international trade/tourism fairs to strengthen and promote the gastronomic identity**

The main tools that could be used for the marketing and promotion of the city's gastronomic identity at a local and at a in European and international level, are local gastronomy festivals, European (e.g. Eurocities Network) and international (e.g. UNESCO Creative Cities Gastronomy Network) networks and international trade and tourism exhibitions.

## **Policy axis 5: Crosscutting policy proposals**

In addition to the above thematic axes, there are some policy proposals that are classified as crosscutting because they touch more than one thematic axis. These policy proposals are presented below and form the policy axis with the crosscutting policy proposals.

### **Policy proposal 5a: Highlighting nutrition-related issues and sustainable and resilient food systems at the local level**

The promotion of the concept of sustainable food and sustainable and resilient food systems is an important aspect of urban food policy.

The triple dimension of sustainability (environmental, social and economic) of urban food systems should be highlighted both at the level of citizens (of all age groups) and at the level of local stakeholders and other parties involved in nutrition-related issues.

Their promotion can be done through the municipal clinics with the voluntary involvement of local actors who will be responsible for these actions both in the clinics and in writing articles on a special Council website from the official website of the Municipality.

### **Policy proposal 5b: Linking the primary sector (agri-food production) with the tertiary sector (catering, tourism)**

The fruitful cooperation between the primary agri-food sector and the tertiary sector, in particular the tourism and catering sectors, is expected to bring significant mutual benefits to the three productive sectors.

The provision of meals in the hotel and catering sector prepared with materials (agri-food products) and traditional recipes of the wider peri-urban countryside, is expected to contribute both to the sustainability of small producers of the peri-urban countryside and to the improvement of the travel and gastronomic experience of visitors to the city.

### **Policy proposal 5c: Promote school vegetable gardens and school green beds**

The creation of school vegetable gardens in school yards and the greening the roofs of school buildings are actions with a significant contribution to the achievement of climate neutrality (through the increase of urban greenery within the dense urban environment) as well as in the field of nutrition by changing the nutritional patterns among school-age children.

The school vegetable gardens and the school green beds can be fields of experiential education and host spaces for experiential workshops that will familiarize students and the school community at large with the production of agri-food products for own consumption.

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