

Practical exercise 3: Improving sustainability through school food

This exercise aims to get participants thinking about sustainable food sources and menu design. After reading 'Environmentally sustainable school meals' and watching the presentation, in groups, analyse and critique one of your recent menus. Think about small steps that could be taken to improve its 'sustainability':

Purchasing food that is fresh and seasonal

What does the menu tell people about the use of seasonal and fresh produce? What value does your menu place on local farming, animal welfare standards and certified sustainable fish? How effectively do you communicate to staff, parents and pupils in order to instil confidence in your school meal service?

Do sustainable menus cost more or less?

In many cases, there is a narrow focus on buying cheaply rather than valuing quality, provenance, nutrition and sustainability. Is there a perception that sustainable food costs more? Do you think cost can be offset by using less but better quality meat, and adapting menus by reducing the quantity or frequency of meat included in recipes? Do you feel able to balance out the cost and quality of food ingredients across a 4/5 week menu cycle? Remember what it takes in terms of energy, water, land use, labour and finance to produce the food you are cooking and serving. Are you managing food waste well?

Thinking about recipes

The type of food we eat and food waste has a significant contribution to Green House Gas Emissions. Making small changes to existing dishes can improve their sustainability. Some people say foods with the lowest impact on the environment tend to be the foods recommended for a healthier diet, so is an environmentally sustainable menu also a healthy menu? What do you think? Food and nutrient guidelines for school meals suggests that red meat (beef, lamb, venison, pork) is served around twice a week to assist in meeting the mandatory nutrient standards for school lunches. How many times is it on your menu? Could some quantity of meat within a dish be replaced with vegetables?

Telling the story about our school food

- How well does your school food service 'sell the story' of school menus and the quality of food used to deliver them?
- Is it clear to all staff, parents and pupils where the food used for school meals comes from?
- Do your parents, staff and customers know how much care has been put into producing sustainable menus and sourcing great food?

