



Nourish



Guide to Best Practices and Green Criteria for Low-Carbon Food Procurement

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Nourish developed this resource as recommendations and advice to address the needs expressed by the [Buyers for Climate Action](#) (BCA), a coalition of leading green public buyers, to enable more low-carbon food procurement.

The authors thank BCA members for their contributions to this resource, including:

- Government of Canada
- Government of British Columbia
- Government of Quebec
- City of Vancouver
- City of Toronto
- City of Montreal

[Nourish](#) is a national non-profit working with health care organizations, communities, and policy-makers to improve food in health care - one hospital tray at a time. Nourish champions public sector leadership for sustainable food systems that build health. A key focus is strengthening knowledge and capacity around values-based procurement. In 2023, Nourish published a [primer resource](#) and followed it up in 2024 with an [implementation guide](#).

Nourish acknowledges that food is deeply rooted in land, culture, and community. The work of transforming food procurement to be more just and low-carbon must begin with recognizing the Indigenous communities who have stewarded these lands and waters since time immemorial.

This guide was created on the traditional, unceded, and treaty territories of many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples across Canada. We recognize the ongoing impacts of colonization on food systems, including the displacement of Indigenous communities from their lands and the disruption of traditional foodways.

We honour Indigenous knowledge keepers, farmers, harvesters, and food sovereignty leaders who continue to protect and restore relationships with the land, ensuring food is not just sustenance, but a source of healing and connection. As we work towards a low-carbon future, we commit to learning from and centering Indigenous leadership, knowing that true sustainability is inseparable from justice, reciprocity, and respect for the land and all who nourish it.



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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
Introduction	6
Leveraging Food Service Contracts for Carbon Reduction	9
Optimizing Low-Carbon Procurement in Self-Operated Food Services	13
Low-Carbon Food for Events and Meetings	17
Implementation	19
Next Steps	28
Appendixes	30
Appendix A: Policy Trends	30
Appendix B: Additional Reading	32

Executive Summary

As food represents nearly one-third of all global greenhouse gases (GHGs), the way Canada's public buyers procure food is a powerful lever for climate action.

This document outlines key strategies for advancing low-carbon food procurement, which is imperative for the transition to net zero. These practices are gaining momentum in health care and on campuses across the country. Best practices and green criteria are detailed in this guide and can support greater low-carbon food procurement by the public sector and the greening of government operations.

Key Findings

- Existing food procurement contributes to significant greenhouse gas emissions, primarily through sourcing high-carbon foods and food waste.
- Some trailblazers have taken action toward sustainable procurement, but there remains a need for collective action and comprehensive implementation of low-carbon food procurement guidance across sectors.
- This transition can be cost-neutral or cost-saving in the long term, especially when factoring in other potential benefits.



Recommendations

- **Enact low-carbon food procurement by public buyers to support net-zero operations.** The transition to low-carbon food procurement is both a necessary and achievable step in advancing climate-resilient government and food systems.
- **Build low-carbon value chains.** Collaborate with food producers, processors and suppliers to further develop value chains and to source more sustainably produced, low-carbon food products, encouraging transparency and incentivizing greater sustainability.
- **Invest in training and capacity building.** Invest in training for public sector executive leaders on the opportunities for low-carbon food procurement to align with climate objectives; invest in capacity building for procurement officers and food service teams to operationalize low-carbon food procurement and menus.
- **Set goals and track progress.** Set targets and establish reporting frameworks to assess the environmental impact of food procurement practices and track progress toward sustainability goals.
- **Align through collaboration.** Establish cross-sector working groups to align policies across procurement, health, agriculture, and climate sectors. Enable or establish communities of practice and public buyers for transitioning to sustainable procurement models. Do this work with a lens of cultural humility which acknowledges differences between carbon-intensive food systems and regenerative, land and culture-based food systems.

Adopting low-carbon food procurement goals presents a viable pathway for public buyers to reduce the environmental footprint and demonstrate necessary leadership in climate action.

By implementing the recommended strategies, public buyers can meaningfully contribute to sustainability efforts, supporting the development of more regional, sustainable food value chains. This transition is not only imperative for environmental resilience but also an opportunity to foster healthier communities, economies, and food systems at large.



Introduction

The Rationale for Decarbonizing Food

Food represents nearly one-third of all global greenhouse gases (GHGs).^{1,2} Reducing food waste and shifting toward more plant-rich diets are needed for a sustainable future. A key strategy for achieving net-zero targets will be to move toward the planetary health diet by increasing the consumption of low-carbon foods like grains, seeds, legumes, fruits, and vegetables and reducing high-carbon foods.

There is great potential for public buyers to leverage their spending to reduce climate impact and encourage a more sustainable food system. The most impactful procurement is reducing the purchase of high-carbon food categories for day-to-day food service operations, events, and meetings. There are many ways to reduce food's climate impact, and these strategies have many co-benefits.

The Main Approaches to Reducing Food-Related Emissions

- Menu shifts to lower-carbon foods (including through choice architecture and behavioural science approaches).
- Reducing packaging and food waste.
- Reducing transportation with shorter supply chains.
- Choosing more sustainable suppliers and supporting supplier transition to sustainable practices.

¹ <https://www.unido.org/stories/new-research-shows-food-system-responsible-third-global-anthropogenic-emissions>
² https://eatforum.org/content/uploads/2019/07/EAT-Lancet_Commission_Summary_Report.pdf



Key Co-Benefits to Low-Carbon Food Procurement

- **Supporting regional economies.** Canadian public purchasing power directed towards serving environmentally friendly options also benefits regional economic development by encouraging the viability of small- and medium-scale farms and processors. Globally, small and medium-scale farmers produce 80% of the world's food but only 42% of agricultural emissions.³
- **Improved offerings that respond to consumer demand.** Consumers are increasingly interested in plant-based foods, with 61% of Canadians purchasing them.⁴ We expect this trend to continue as consumers continue to look for the co-benefits of plant-forward diets to their own health and the health of the planet.
- **Alignment with Canada's Food Guide.** Eating more plant-based foods and less animal products reduces carbon in menus and aligns with the Planetary Health Diet⁵ and Canada's Food Guide.⁶
- **Positive ecological, social, and economic feedback loops.** Increased demand for low-carbon foods improves soil health and carbon sequestration as well as the long-term resilience of food systems, for example, insulating them from climate disruptions or trade conflicts.

Embedded Greenhouse Gas Emissions along the Food Supply Chain

Source: Poore, J., & Nemecek, T. (2018). Reducing food's environmental impacts through producers and consumers. *Science*, 360(6392), 987-992. Processed by Our World in Data. <https://ourworldindata.org/environmental-impacts-of-food>



Image Description: An infographic of greenhouse gas emissions across the food supply chain, with the largest contributions from farms (58%) and land use change (24%). Smaller emissions (18%) come from processing, packaging, transport, retail, and food waste.

³ <https://www.fao.org/newsroom/detail/small-family-farmers-produce-a-third-of-the-world-s-food/en#:~:text=Regional%20and%20local%20factors%20are,further%20study%2C%20the%20authors%20say>

⁴ <https://www.fhpc.ca/en/News/putting-plant-based-foods-in-the-spotlight>

⁵ <https://eatforum.org/eat-lancet-commission/the-planetary-health-diet-and-you/>

⁶ <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/>

Leveraging Low-Carbon Food Categories

By understanding where emissions are embedded and leveraging tools like Life Cycle Assessment (LCA), public buyers can make informed decisions to lower their carbon footprint. GHGs are embedded at every stage of food production and consumption, from the field or sea to the fork to waste. Measuring the climate impact of different foods involves assessing the combined impact of all GHG emissions, measured in kilograms of CO₂ equivalents (kg CO₂e) per unit of food. Databases of tens of thousands of LCAs provide detailed information about emissions at all stages, including land use change, food production, water-related, processing, packaging, transport, distribution, storage, and waste emissions.

Foods with varying environmental impacts can be categorized by carbon intensity, with production practices having the most impactful carbon footprint. Menu changes prioritizing low-carbon ingredients deliver the most significant reductions in GHG emissions. Shifting purchasing away from high-emission foods like beef and cheese toward lower-carbon alternatives such as legumes, grains, and plant-based options is one of the most effective strategies for reducing food-related emissions.

Food: Greenhouse Gas Emissions along the Supply Chain

Source: Poore, J., & Nemecek, T. (2018). Reducing food's environmental impacts through producers and consumers. *Science*, 360(6392), 987-992. Processed by Our World in Data. <https://ourworldindata.org/environmental-impacts-of-food>

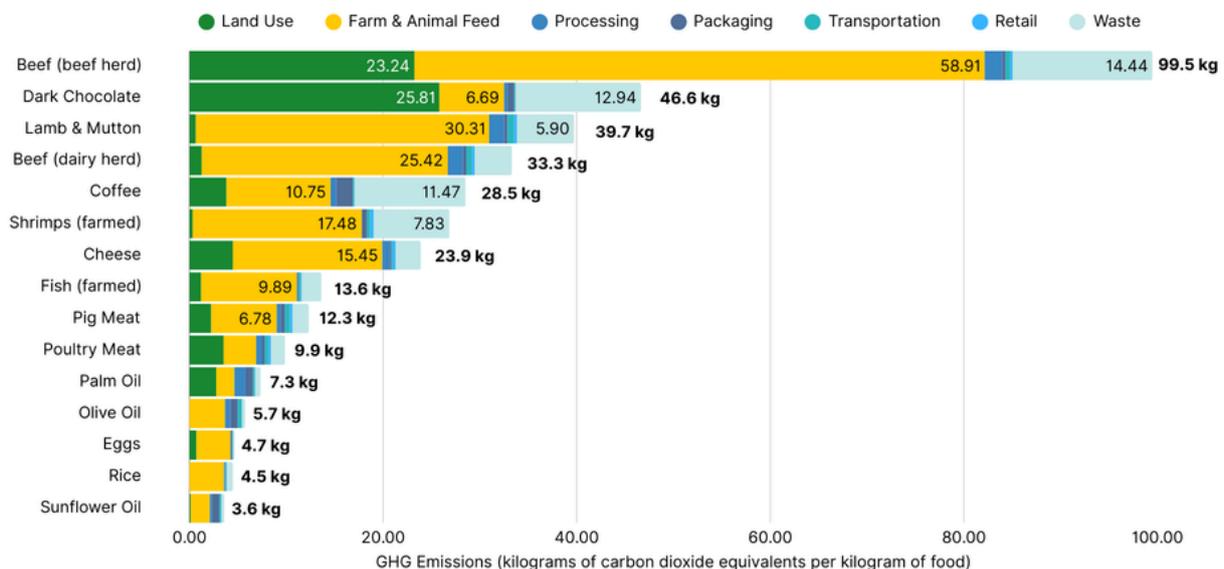


Image Description: This bar chart compares the greenhouse gas emissions of different foods across the supply chain, with beef having the highest impact, followed by dark chocolate, lamb, coffee, shrimp, and pig meat. The emissions are broken down into categories like land use, farm and feed, processing, packaging, transportation, retail, and waste.

Leveraging Food Service Contracts for Carbon Reduction

Leveraging Requests For Proposals (RFP) for food service management contracts is a key strategy to achieve low-carbon food procurement by identifying bidders who can evolve menus and supply chains to achieve climate action goals.

On the following pages, Table 1.0 highlights core elements for the RFP and other processes.

Working with Existing Food Service Management Contracts

For food services that are currently contracted, beginning a dialogue with both on-site management and national corporate senior management about low-carbon food goals is a key starting point. Before meeting, review the existing contract for reference to sustainability goals. Identify if their contract includes provider incentives for sustainability performance metrics, such as food waste, GHG reduction targets or plant-forward menu adoption rates. Many of the strategies throughout this guide would be applicable. With on-site management, you could begin the process to review the current menu and identify carbon hotspots where menu shifts would be most impactful, survey customers about their knowledge and interest in plant-forward eating, and test new plant-based dishes with specials or events first.

The food service management sector is increasingly promoting plant-forward menus to meet growing consumer demand for healthier and sustainable options. Work with food service providers to engage their supply chains, requesting lower-carbon options. Share successful examples where contracted food service providers have incorporated low-carbon menus within institutional settings. This demonstrates feasibility. Communicating with national corporate senior management about sustainability goals will support implementation and, importantly, signals to the sector future priorities for public buyers.

Table 1.0 Core Elements for RFPs and other Processes

Core Element & Rationale	Sample Language/Practice
<p>Clarifying Low-Carbon Priorities: Clarifying goals for food service menus, purchasing and operations to reduce carbon emissions is a foundational element.</p>	<p>Food represents nearly one-third of all global greenhouse gases (GHGs).^{7,8} A key strategy for achieving net-zero targets will be to move toward the planetary health diet by increasing the consumption of low-carbon foods like grains, seeds, legumes, fruits, and vegetables and reducing more carbon-intensive foods. The contract seeks to maximize the opportunity for the food services offered at [X] to reduce the carbon emissions through strategies such as: plant-forward menus, reducing waste and sourcing from sustainable and regional suppliers.</p>
<p>Proposal Evaluation Process and Criteria: The scoring rubric shall communicate how low-carbon values will be weighted and measured in the assessment of bids. Weighting can balance cost, experience, sustainability, and other aspects of operations. RFPs can also include criteria for requirements (pass/fail) and qualitative evaluation.</p>	<p>A sample rubric for the University of Maine System bid evaluation is available in the Recommendations for the Food Service Contracting Process (pp. 12 -13)⁹ focused on local, sustainable goals which could be adapted for low-carbon priorities:</p> <p>Stage 1 – Requirements (Pass/Fail): A review of all received Proposals will be completed by the University of Maine System RFP Committee to determine compliance with all of the requirements listed in the RFP. Proposals that do not comply with all the requirements may be subject to disqualification and not evaluated.</p> <p>Stage 2 – Qualitative Evaluation: All Proposals that have passed Stage 1 of the evaluation process shall proceed to Stage 2 for evaluation by the RFP committee, with scoring (out of 100 points) based on the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vendor Value: meal plan rates; service fees; rebates; labor; food procurement plan that will align with 20% commitments. (25) • Company Management & Experience: On-site Food Service Director & management team; References, with particular emphasis on those indicating Maine and New England connections and experience. (15) • Program & Services: menu-planning that has variety and considers affordability; catering; culturally-appropriate foods; customer service; food quality brands and non-brands; hours of operation; staff training and development. (15) • Innovation: student engagement; meeting campus diversity needs; adding customers by improving quality, sustainability & programming. (10) • Maine Economic Impact: use of businesses owned and operated in Maine for food distribution, processing, repair, and other services; purchase of local products grown and processed in Maine; where outside brands are used on campus, priority is placed on businesses owned and operated in Maine. (10) • Sustainability Measures & Local Foods Procurement: menus that focus on seasonal availability and local/regional sourcing; sustainability, environmental goals & overall accountability to goals. (10) • Transparency & Campus/Community Partnership: plan to be transparent with information about rebates, volume, and some pricing information to help with local foods sourcing and planning; plan to participate in the University of Maine System Food Working Group, campus-based committees and working groups, & supply chain development efforts across the state. (10) • Renovation & Alterations: concept designs and ideas. (5)

⁷ <https://www.unido.org/stories/new-research-shows-food-system-responsible-third-global-anthropogenic-emissions>

⁸ https://eatforum.org/content/uploads/2019/07/EAT-Lancet_Commission_Summary_Report.pdf

⁹ https://www.farmtoinstitution.org/sites/default/files/imce/uploads/MaineFoodfortheUMaineSystem_RFPReco.pdf

Core Element & Rationale	Sample Language/Practice
<p>Assessment: Use a simple process to assess relevant components of the RFP, working towards targets.</p>	<p>Utilize a simple process for assessment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 = a vague response regarding effort • 2 = plan and backup clearly articulated • 3 = a comprehensive plan outlined with data supporting proponents' success to date
<p>Clarifying Objectives through Clear Targets:</p>	
<p>A. Reducing carbon in menus.</p> <p>The RFP can specify how they envisage bidders delivering a low-carbon menu. Three common approaches are along a continuum from entirely plant-based menus to plant-forward menus to omnivore menus with stepwise reductions towards a target.</p>	<p>Plant-forward menus can be defined in a variety of ways, common approaches are listed below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entirely plant-based menu • Mandatory plant-based options <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Example: Every meal service includes at least one entirely plant-based main entree that prioritizes plant-based protein ingredients like beans, lentils, chickpeas, or other legumes. • Progressively increasing plant-forward <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Example: At least 20% of main entrees are plant-based every week, with that number growing by 10% annually until it reaches at least 70%. • Limiting animal products <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Example: Beef, pork, lamb, and poultry servings do not exceed 2.5 ounces per meal. When offering multiple main course options, at least one dish must include less than 2 ounces of animal protein (e.g. as a garnish or as a blended option). Targets can be set to reach a specific goal of reducing animal-based proteins in the overall food spend over time. • Sustainable beverage guidelines. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Example: If milk is served, offer at least one non-dairy alternative. Drinking water must be provided at no charge with every meal. • Menus that celebrate cultural diversity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Example: Design plant-forward menus to celebrate the ever-growing cultural diversity in Canada. The New York City Health + Hospital Network has provided more than 1.2M tasty, nutritious, and culturally diverse plant-based meals since 2022.¹⁰
<p>B. Reducing waste in food service operations. Procurement guidance on packaging waste and greening transportation can also be used by FSMCs and/or self-operated facilities to engage suppliers and transition to more sustainable supply chains.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Request details on food waste reduction targets and strategies through source reduction, rescue, and recycling strategies. (Recycled food refers to uses for inedible food like animal feeding; anaerobic digestion; industrial uses for fats, oils, and grease; and composting)¹¹ • Requirements to provide reusable dishware • Requirements to eliminate plastic bottles and offer price incentives for customers who bring their own coffee cups or food containers • Eliminating single-use items (e.g. condiments, milk for coffee stations, etc.) for service

¹⁰ <https://www.nychealthandhospitals.org/pressrelease/nyc-health-hospitals-celebrates-1-2-million-plant-based-meals-served/>
¹¹ <https://practicegreenhealth.org/topics/food/sustainable-purchasing>.

Core Element & Rationale	Sample Language/Practice
<p>C. Advancing other sustainability goals. Public buyers can set goals related to environmental and social criteria that are verified by third-party certifications and can also articulate goals requiring engagement with supply chains to validate.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainability targets can be set for products with third-party certifications, including those for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable seafood • Certified Organic • Regenerative Farming • FairTrade • Animal welfare standards • Additional goals and priorities that could be articulated, which do not have third-party certifications currently: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Sourcing 'seconds' or 'ugly' foods ◦ Supporting supplier businesses operated by equity-deserving groups ◦ Prioritizing seasonal ingredients ◦ Reducing ultra-processed foods ◦ Greening transportation (e.g. electrifying fleet)
<p>Supply Chain Partnership and Development: The RFP can request bidders provide a list of supply chain partners they currently contract with to get a sense of their existing network. As many FSMC contracts are multi-year and regional food systems constantly evolve, contractors ideally can build in flexibility for evolving their supplier network as contexts change and new priorities emerge for facilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Request bidders to provide proof of engagement with regional supply chain partners. • Request bidders to outline their willingness and ability to incorporate new vendors as requested during the contract, to clearly specify the proposed approval process for new suppliers/producers so this can be assessed in the bid evaluation process. • Targets can be set in the RFP to catalyze new pathways to market for small and mid-sized producers with low-carbon practices. These producers could enjoy an accelerated vetting process to be added as a Vendor of Record, for the benefit of both the current and future buyers.
<p>Engaging Eaters for Success: Engaging eaters when implementing low-carbon food procurement is essential.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Request from bidders details on how they engage with eaters when designing and developing menus, and regularly during the contract so that customer surveys and other processes can inform food service operation continuous improvement.
<p>Active Contract Management: Proactive and strategic contract management with food service operators is essential to ensure objectives are met. Without clear performance tracking and enforcement, operators may prioritize cost-cutting at the expense of standards.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To drive accountability, contracts should include specific, measurable targets with defined timelines and enforceable consequences for non-compliance, such as financial penalties or the possibility of early termination. Regular performance reviews provide opportunities for continuous improvement and course correction. • Additionally, limiting contract terms to shorter terms (with optional potential for renewal) helps maintain buyer leverage and enables periodic reassessment of procurement standards, sustainability goals, and service provider performance. This approach ensures adaptability to evolving priorities and prevents long-term commitments to underperforming vendors.

Optimizing Low-Carbon Procurement in Self-Operated Food Services

Self-operated food services can utilize the low-carbon food strategies identified above for food service contracts. In addition, they can explore the practices listed below for growing their low-carbon food procurement.

Table 2.0 Core Elements for Self-Operated Food Services

Core Element	Rationale	Sample Language/Practice
Creating a Low-Carbon Food Procurement Preamble	Procurement teams can use a preamble to clearly state a public buyer's commitment to low-carbon food procurement and outline expectations for suppliers regarding sourcing and waste reduction. By framing these expectations upfront, buyers can make it easier to compare suppliers based on both price and environmental impact.	The preamble should specify that preference will be given to foods with lower environmental impact, such as plant-based proteins, locally sourced and sustainable ingredients, and items with minimal packaging. It can also encourage suppliers to highlight and expand their sustainability initiatives, including emissions tracking, responsible supply chains, and food waste reduction programs.
Baselining and Tracking for Success	Establishing clear and measurable goals and milestones for reduction targets is crucial in implementing a low-carbon food procurement strategy. By setting annual goals, public buyers can create incremental change that builds and sustains impact over time. Public buyers can identify carbon-intensive food categories and set reduction targets for a product category or they can prioritize setting a target for reducing their overall food-related GHG emissions.	Suppliers are encouraged to propose innovative solutions that contribute to the reduction of carbon emissions within the food supply chain. This may include the adoption of renewable energy in production facilities, utilization of electric vehicles for transportation, or development of carbon offset programs. Proposals will be evaluated to assess a commitment to continuous improvement in sustainability, including clear emissions reduction goals over time.

Core Element	Rationale	Sample Language/Practice
Prioritizing Procurement from Small- and Medium-Sized Businesses	<p>To move nimbly and to test out relationships and products, public buyers can purchase directly and/or utilize invitations to quote where possible (subject to procurement thresholds). Additionally, unbundling larger contracts can enable a broader range of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to have the opportunity to submit bids.</p>	<p>Procurement thresholds vary with municipal, provincial and federal government guidelines, but there is typically latitude for: Small purchases from one supplier which allows for quick purchases of smaller quantities of food. Informal invitations to quote - Buyers can invite quotes from different suppliers to ensure competitive pricing. Formal invitation to quote - Buyers can invite quotes from all suppliers, but do not require RFP processes.</p>
	<p>To further support the expansion and sustainability of small- and medium-scale food businesses, public buyers can enter into forward contracts with producers to ensure that a specified product in an agreed volume will be reasonably available at a particular time at an agreed-upon price. These types of contracts remain uncommon between institutional buyers and small-scale growers, but they can benefit both parties. For the grower, the commitment can enable them to obtain financing if required to scale up their operations. For the buyer, it assures that products will be available for their food service operations.</p>	<p>Establishing and renewing these agreements fosters longer-term relationships, promotes increased financial stability, and helps to build the regional capacity of local farmers to meet hospital and other institutions' demands. Consider the example of the City of Thunder Bay, which used forward contracting to achieve its local purchasing goal, increasing its local spend from 15% (2012) to 34% (2018).¹²</p>
Prioritizing Low-Carbon Suppliers	<p>Selecting suppliers with strong environmental practices helps ensure that procurement decisions support overall sustainability goals. Buyers can prioritize vendors that demonstrate commitments to waste reduction, efficient transportation, and sustainable sourcing. This may include suppliers that use electric or low-emission delivery fleets, minimize packaging waste, implement energy-efficient operations, or utilize third-party certifications to assess food sustainability. Including these requirements in bid evaluations and contract language ensures that public buyers are sourcing food from vendors that actively reduce emissions and environmental impact.</p>	<p>Suppliers must demonstrate adherence to sustainable practices by providing evidence of certifications or memberships in recognized environmental programs. This includes, but is not limited to, ISO 14001 certification and participation in initiatives that promote sustainable procurement and low-carbon operations (e.g. SBTi,¹³ The Net-Zero Challenge¹⁴). Proposals will be assessed regarding demonstrated commitments to sustainability, such as regenerative agriculture practices, Marine Stewardship Council, zero-waste initiatives or other regional certifications (e.g. Aliments du Québec) can help verify a supplier's commitment to sustainability.</p>

¹² <https://20441233.fs1.hubspotusercontent-na1.net/hubfs/20441233/Executive%2BSummary%2BTPTF-Thunder%2BBay.pdf>

¹³ <https://sciencebasedtargets.org/>

¹⁴ <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/environment/weather/climatechange/climate-plan/net-zero-emissions-2050/challenge.html>

Core Element	Rationale	Sample Language/Practice
Reducing Waste through Packaging, Portion and Pack Sizes	<p>Thoughtful procurement can significantly reduce food and packaging waste while maintaining cost efficiency. Sourcing food in portion sizes that match food service needs helps prevent leftovers from being discarded. For example, if lasagna is frequently wasted because it comes in a 36-portion pan, switching to a 12-portion option can reduce excess. Similarly, choosing 125 milliliter milk cartons instead of 250 milliliter ones ensures less waste when full servings are unnecessary. Minimizing single-use packaging also lowers emissions by reducing material production and disposal. Buyers can prioritize bulk options, such as pourable juice cartons in reusable cups rather than individual plastic containers. Vendors can also be required to offer products with recyclable or compostable packaging and limit unnecessary wrapping.</p>	<p>All food products must be delivered using sustainable packaging solutions that are either reusable, recyclable, or compostable. Suppliers should outline their packaging strategies and waste reduction initiatives, aiming to minimize the environmental footprint associated with product delivery. Packaging should avoid excessive plastic and instead use materials that align with Canada's Zero Plastic Waste by 2030 initiative.</p>
Utilizing RFIs to Find Suppliers of Identified Low-Carbon Food Options	<p>A Request for Information (RFI) is a valuable tool for procurement teams looking to source low-carbon food options before issuing other tenders. An RFI can also help to develop value chains, signalling demand for low-carbon food products and encouraging suppliers to meet the market opportunity.</p>	<p>By posting an RFI, buyers can gather details on supplier capabilities, product availability, and pricing for specific climate-friendly foods such as plant-based proteins, seasonal ingredients, or low-emission dairy alternatives and assess market readiness. This proactive step ensures that when a formal solicitation is issued, buyers have a clearer understanding of market readiness and can structure Requests for Quotations (RFQs) or Requests for Proposals (RFPs) accordingly.</p>

Core Element	Rationale	Sample Language/Practice
<p>Expanding Supplier Engagement Beyond RFIs</p>	<p>Public procurement can favour incumbents who are most familiar with and well resourced to navigate institutional purchasing and large, multi-year contracts. Building a strong supplier base for low-carbon food, including identifying promising new entrants to the market or vendors ready to scale their operations, will likely require more than just posting a Request for Information (RFI). By taking an active role in supplier engagement, procurement teams can drive value-chain development and accelerate the shift toward more sustainable food systems. It also alerts to biases or blind spots in procurement processes that may be stagnating innovation in the market or disadvantage promising suppliers. Expanding beyond RFIs allows buyers to signal demand, encourage supplier innovation, and ensure that sustainability expectations are met well before formal purchasing decisions are made.</p>	<p>Procurement teams can shape the market by engaging suppliers early and consistently, ensuring they understand sustainability expectations and can address capacity issues or other barriers. Engagement can involve: supplier briefings, farm visits, training sessions, or direct outreach to food distributors.</p> <p>Strategies can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjusting contract terms or providing clearer specifications in bid documents • Creating pre-qualified supplier lists that prioritize goal-aligned vendors • Working with distributors to establish new Vendors of Record and integrate sustainable products into procurement catalogues • Offering a bid debrief when promising low-carbon vendors are unsuccessful in a contract bid, to provide them with the knowledge to refine their offering for the future (for example, a bid evaluation that calculates cost per portion instead of cost per gram of protein may have the unintended consequence of favouring a lower quality product)¹⁵ <p>These efforts help level the playing field for small and regional producers, who may struggle to navigate government contracts. Provincial ministry of agriculture business development offices have direct contacts with industry associations who know who can supply specific needs.</p>

¹⁵ https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58829365c534a576e10e3a5c/t/58d559bc3e00be4a328a3a88/1490377163560/2015-09-17_-_Greenbelt_Fund_Working_Paper_-_Farm_to_Institution_-_The_Power_of_Public_Sector_Purchasing_-_FINAL.pdf

Low-Carbon Food for Events and Meetings

Incorporating sustainability into the planning of an event or meeting's food offerings can significantly lower a convening's overall carbon footprint. By shifting procurement toward plant-based options, reducing food waste and planning for food recovery for events, organizers can further sustainability goals, improve nutrition, support community food access and potentially also realize cost savings.

Table 3.0 Core Elements for Events and Meetings

Core Element	Rationale	Sample language/practice
Defining Low-Carbon Goals	Establish clear sustainability priorities for catering services, such as plant-based meals, minimizing food waste, and sustainable serving ware.	<p>Refer to sample language guidelines for event and meeting catering outlined above in Section Three of this resource, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serving a seasonal, plant-forward menu. • Locally & seasonally sourced ingredients. Vendors specify sourcing practices, supplier relationships and ingredient origins. • Food waste reduction plan. Demonstrate how they will plan portions carefully, redistribute leftovers, and manage composting. • Sustainable serving ware. Prioritize use of reusable or compostable materials; single-use plastics should be prohibited. • Low-carbon beverages. Commitment to serving tap water, avoiding single-use bottles, and minimizing high-emission drinks.¹⁶ • Minimal food transportation emissions. Use of local suppliers and energy-efficient logistics. • Post-event sustainability report. Require reporting on sustainability metrics, including food waste tracking, emissions reduction efforts, and summarizing ingredient sourcing to inform future event planning. • Identify caterers with sustainability certifications (e.g., Green Restaurant Association, ISO 14001, or B Corp.) • Identify caterers who have demonstrated sustainability practices with low-carbon, sustainable menus and sourcing.

¹⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20241212-whats-the-lowest-carbon-alcohol>

Core Element	Rationale	Sample language/practice
Identifying Caterers	Identify caterers with certifications and/or demonstrated sustainability practices to prioritize in vendor shortlists for obtaining quotes.	Identify caterers with sustainability certifications (e.g., Green Restaurant Association, ISO 14001, or B Corp.) Identify caterers who have demonstrated sustainability practices with low-carbon, sustainable menus and sourcing.
Proposal Evaluation and Scoring	Assign weighted scores for sustainability in the bid evaluation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Require bidders to submit a sustainability impact statement outlining their low-carbon initiatives. Award points for vendors who provide carbon footprint data comparing a typical menu with their plant-forward proposal.
Surveying Event Participants	Offering delicious low-carbon menus at events creates opportunities for participants to try plant-forward dishes. Event organizers can conduct consumer surveys to better understand interest and perceptions about plant-forward eating.	Survey ideas to adapt for colleagues and/or event participants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Today's event featured a fully plant-based menu. Did you enjoy it? Do you have any feedback? What are the main reasons you may choose plant-based alternatives over animal products? (Select all that apply): Ethical reasons (animal welfare); Health reasons; Environmental reasons; Taste preference; Allergies or intolerances; Not interested currently How often do you currently consume plant-based meals? Daily; Several times a week; Occasionally; Never Do you think [X cafeteria/ future events] should offer more plant-based options on menus?
Further Developing your Organization's Event and Meeting Guidelines	Build guidance documents to promote greater food sustainability in organizational meetings and events.	Adapt from many existing resources (such as Harvard's Sustainable Meeting & Event Guide ¹⁷) to develop guidance documents to host more sustainable meetings and events.

¹⁷ <https://sustainable.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Sustainable-Meeting-and-Event-Guide.pdf>

Implementation

The implementation of low-carbon food procurement best practices can be optimized with several strategies:

- Supporting the impact of procurement activities through menu transformation
- Coupling decarbonization with waste reduction for maximum impact
- Promoting collaboration and supporting progress through working groups and communities of practice
- Engaging chefs for culinary leadership across the organization
- Implementing strategies to engage eaters for successful uptake
- Pre-empting common barriers with creativity and persistence
- Committing to the process with a stepwise strategy



Common Approaches to Low-Carbon Menus

Common approaches to low-carbon menus can be seen along a spectrum from full plant-based menus to predominantly plant-based ones to the most accessible for any food service operation to begin with stepwise menu changes. Likewise, the reduction of food waste is also a key focus for food service teams to lower the emissions associated with their services. Project Drawdown has identified that “roughly one-third of the world’s food is never eaten. For food services specifically, multiple strategies can be employed, including reducing waste at every stage, utilizing food recovery partnerships, tracking progress, and harnessing choice architecture and behavioural science.

i. Full plant-based menus (vegan/vegetarian)

Food service menus can be designed to feature low-carbon food options by removing all animal-derived foods from offerings. Our research has identified a transition to a full plant-based menu at the University of Guelph Child Care Centre.¹⁸ Their case study outlines the many benefits this plant-based menu transformation offered and how it was enabled by a particular set of circumstances that may/may not be feasible as an initial strategy in most public food service operations.

ii. Plant-forward menus (a significant majority of menu offerings are plant-based)

An approach successfully piloted in hospitals and other public institutions is redesigning menus with a significant emphasis on low-carbon food. Menus are plant-forward and consider the food volumes purchased to work towards reducing food-related GHG over time, but they still include animal-based ingredients for an omnivore offering.

iii. Stepwise menu change

(changing one ingredient/menu item at a time)

This is the most accessible way for all food service operations to begin implementing low-carbon food immediately. High-carbon ingredients, menu items and product categories are identified so that low-carbon, plant-forward options can be brought in to replace them, enabling stepwise menu changes over time. Other approaches, like the well-known Meatless Monday campaign, can support low-carbon food with a dedicated food service offering.



¹⁸ <https://www.uoguelph.ca/childcare/system/files/CCLC%20Food%20Sustainability%20Report.pdf>

Reducing Food Waste at Every Stage

Food waste is a roadmap to smarter, low-carbon procurement—revealing where to cut costs, optimize choices, and invest more wisely. Worldwide, about one-third of all food produced is wasted, which includes all the energy, resources, and money that went into that food’s lifecycle. It is responsible for an estimated eight percent of global emissions. Food waste can be identified and reduced at three main stages of food services:

- Production waste is defined as any unused food products as meals are created. This can include meat and vegetable trimmings, egg shells, foods that expired before use, spills on the floor, and more.
- Pan waste results from creating or purchasing larger dish sizes than what needs to be served. For example, a 24-serving lasagna is thawed and heated for service, but only five servings are dished up for eaters.
- Plate waste is the food that remains after a person eats their portion. This can be one bite of yogurt, a bowl of soup, or an entire lunch.

A fourth category of waste exists for non-food items headed to the landfill, mainly plastic and other packaging materials from food delivery, storage, and consumption. Waste audits conducted at a continuing care retirement facility for a study by Hackes and Shanklin showed that packaging comprised 28.2% of the total waste stream by weight and 85.9% by volume.¹⁹

Food service operations should plan for food recovery to donate safe leftover food to programs that help people in their communities. Connections can be made with national organizations such as Food Banks Canada or Second Harvest, or with local and regional food programs to ensure minimal food finds its way into waste streams.

Many strategies can be employed to not only reduce food waste, but also increase the consumption of food by eaters. This involves thoughtful consideration of many factors:

- Setting the timing of meals to coincide with the eater’s hunger and availability. (e.g., inmates will not eat lunch served when they are attending a medical appointment)
- Meeting cultural needs (e.g., access to traditional and country foods or serving meals with appropriate inclusions like chopsticks or flatbreads)
- Enhancing the food environment (e.g., not administering medications in shared dining rooms)

To specifically increase the choice and acceptance of climate-friendly foods, many behavioural science-backed techniques can be applied to the menu and its promotion, as outlined by Coolfood’s Playbook for Promoting Sustainable Food Choices.²⁰

¹⁹ <https://www.greenhealthcare.ca/images/publications/h2010102%20waste%20reduction%20research%20paper.pdf>

²⁰ <https://www.wri.org/research/food-service-playbook-promoting-sustainable-food-choices>

Working Groups and Communities of Practice for Collaboration

Both internal working groups and external communities of practice offer invaluable opportunities to collaborate on initiatives.

Building a dedicated working group is a crucial first step in advancing low-carbon food procurement. A well-structured team brings together key stakeholders with the expertise to navigate procurement policies, financial considerations, menu planning, and operational logistics, and could be structured in the following way:

Table 4.0 Roles for Collaboration

Position	Role in the Working Group
Sustainability Manager	Leads strategy development, ensuring alignment with climate goals and institutional commitments.
Procurement Officer	Oversees purchasing processes, integrates sustainability criteria into RFPs, and ensures compliance with trade agreements.
Food Services Director	Works with suppliers and staff to implement menu changes and sustainable sourcing practices.
Dietitian	Ensures low-carbon menu changes meet nutritional standards and align with dietary guidelines.
Financial Officer	Assesses cost implications and financial feasibility and ensures budget alignment with procurement goals.
Operations / Facilities Manager	Supports implementation, ensuring infrastructure and logistics support sustainable food service.
Communications / Engagement Lead	Develops messaging, educates staff and stakeholders, and builds support for procurement changes.
Executive Sponsor (VP/Director level)	Provides high-level leadership, builds connection to organizational strategic plan, secures resources needed, and removes barriers to implementation.

Like most ambitious goals, advancing low-carbon food procurement is more effective when teams engage in a community of practice or peer network committed to shared learning, problem-solving, and continuous improvement. These communities provide critical benefits like knowledge sharing, aligning efforts for collective impact, technical support, accountability, and policy influence.

Participating in new or existing networks, like Nourish’s Planetary Health community of practice for health care organizations,²¹ helps changemakers stay informed, troubleshoot challenges with peers, and drive meaningful progress toward sustainable food procurement.

Engaging Chefs for Culinary Leadership Across the Organization

Chefs are central to transitioning to a planetary health diet, and investing in their training is key to implementing low-carbon food procurement. When chefs are equipped with the skills and knowledge to create climate-friendly meals, they can transform institutional menus to enhance both sustainability and customer satisfaction.

During their time in the national Nourish cohort, Vancouver Coastal Health demonstrated this by collaborating with Chef Ned Bell to revamp hospital food through hands-on culinary workshops and skill-building sessions, ensuring that sustainability and taste go hand in hand.²² Strong leadership support and strategic communication also played a crucial role in the success of their planetary menu pilot.

The Copenhagen House of Food²³ created a model taking a similar approach with over a decade of investing (2007 - 2018) in capacity building with food services focused on organic ingredients and improving meal quality in public kitchens, and they continue to work towards reducing food-related carbon emissions by 25% by 2030.²⁴

Engaging kitchen teams through recipe competitions, taste panels, and hands-on innovation fosters excitement and ownership over menu transformation. Enhancing chefs’ expertise in low-carbon, flavourful meals not only improves meal quality but also reduces food waste—an overlooked but critical strategy for cutting emissions. By investing in culinary leadership and hands-on training, institutions can turn sustainability commitments into satisfying, climate-smart meals.



²¹ <https://nourishleadership.ca/programs/planetary-health/>

²² <https://www.vch.ca/en/news/vancouver-general-hospital-pilots-new-plant-rich-menu-items-health-patients-and-planet>

²³ <https://kbh-madhus.webflow.io/english/ourstory>

²⁴ <https://maaltider.kk.dk/sites/default/files/2024-06/Coolfood%20Pledge%202023%20Copenhagen%20climate%20impact%20report.pdf>

Strategies to Engage Eaters

For low-carbon food procurement to be successful, institutions must actively engage the people they serve, whether they are military personnel, children in care programs, inmates in correctional facilities, or employees in government cafeterias. A well-designed engagement strategy ensures that new menu offerings will not only be sustainable but also well-received, reducing resistance and food waste as well as supporting cultural shifts to lower-carbon diets. Population needs vary based on therapeutic factors, activity levels, and existing culture.

Engagement can include:

- **Surveys.** These can effectively gather insights on food preferences, dietary habits, and potential barriers to change. Results can identify which climate-friendly foods might be most accepted, allowing menu development teams to tailor their approach rather than implement it top-down. This becomes particularly important in scenarios with limited choices like non-select health care menus or basic needs provision kitchens.
- **Taste panels / events.** These allow eaters to sample new low-carbon dishes and provide feedback. These events serve a dual purpose: they allow food service teams to refine recipes before implementation and create a sense of involvement and ownership among eaters.
- **Education and storytelling.** Simple messaging on posters, digital signage, or direct staff interactions can highlight a new menu's sustainability and other benefits. Labelling such as "chef's special" can compellingly introduce a new dish. In some settings, theme days can be particularly effective, for example, introducing "Plant-Forward Fridays" with well-promoted meals that showcase sustainable proteins and culinary creativity. Childcare programs might include hands-on food activities, teaching children about seasonal ingredients through storytelling and shared meal preparation. Organizations can track progress toward their climate reduction goals on a thermometer in cafeterias to "bring down the temperature."
- **Field trips.** Farmer visits to facilities or staff/personnel visits to farms to learn about local food systems. Seeing operations first hand is often a transformative and galvanizing experience.
- **Guest chef experiences.** Working with a chef in residence to train staff and promote during meal service.

Ultimately, engaging eaters in the transition to low-carbon menus ensures that sustainability efforts are not just an institutional directive but a collaborative shift toward better food choices. Making eaters part of the process through surveys, taste tests, education, and interactive experiences can increase acceptance, satisfaction, and the long-term success of their climate-friendly food initiatives.

Addressing Common Barriers

Below are potential challenges to and solutions to address low-carbon food procurement.

Table 5.0 Low-Carbon Food Procurement: Barriers and Solutions

Barrier	Challenges	Solutions
Perceived Higher Costs of Food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local, sustainable food is seen as more expensive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilize “less meat/better meat” strategies which balance the cost of higher quality products by reducing overall quantities purchased, e.g. blended mushroom and beef burgers. Design menus around the seasons and purchase foods locally when they are abundant and most affordable. Invest in forward contracts.
Upfront Costs Associated with Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A perception that the operation can’t afford to upgrade our food service menu or operations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Between food waste reduction, replacing animal-based proteins with plant-based ones, and finding other efficiencies, operational improvements can deliver a return on investment.²⁵ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider the example of Sainte Justine Hospital in Montreal, which used a \$2 million kitchen upgrade project to implement a room service model which reduced meal day costs from \$8.00 to \$6.20, decreased waste from 45% to 5%, and raised satisfaction from 50% to 99%.²⁶
Supply Chain Readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited availability of plant-based prepared foods and meals. Limited coordinated ordering and distribution networks for local, sustainable food. Seasonal fluctuations, limited availability of lightly processed ingredients (e.g., produce peeled and chopped, pack sizes, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supplier engagement on food service market opportunities, volumes, and preferred pack size, etc. Purchase from regional small- and medium-sized producers to help the development of regional distribution networks and processing to scale up over time and build value chains to better meet institutional demand. Embrace the opportunity and responsibility of the public sector to play an active role in the curation of more diverse, resilient, and values-based domestic food systems.
Resistance to Change from Food Service Staff / Operators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food service teams, chefs, and procurement staff hesitate to modify menus and contracts. Food service operators worry about losing sales or taking on risks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide training, recipe development workshops, and behavioural nudges to increase buy-in and enthusiasm. Share successful procurement case studies and industry trends demonstrating demand for sustainable food options.

²⁵ <https://us.noharm.org/healthy-food>

²⁶ <https://nourish-healthcare.squarespace.com/practice-study-chu-ste-justine>

Barrier	Challenge	Solution
Concerns about Consumer Preferences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concern over removing choice in food selection with a transition to more low-carbon menus for both cafeteria settings and in food service operations with non-select menus. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement proven behavioural science techniques that support consumer acceptance and interest in plant-forward dishes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For example, vegetarian chili is revamped as ‘Smoky Harvest Chili with Fire-Roasted Tomatoes & Maple Beans.’ For stalwart ‘meat and potatoes’ demographics, begin making transitions by substituting half the animal protein with plants, for example, beef and mushroom bolognese. Implement phased menu changes, tasting events, and clear communication on flavour, health, and inclusivity benefits. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> WRI’s Food Service Playbook provides food service operators with the latest research on engaging diners in more plant-forward eating.²⁷
Plant-Forward Menus and Nutrition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concern that low-carbon menus will not provide sufficient nutrition. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plant-forward menus align with Canada’s Food Guide, which outlines how increasing plants in the diet can successfully meet nutrition needs by encouraging consumption of a variety of healthy foods every day.²⁸
Procurement Favours Incumbents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Current food service contracts and operations favour large-scale distributors, often limiting sustainability considerations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update procurement practices to include carbon reduction targets, sustainability metrics, and supplier engagement strategies. Include in procurement processes strategies to build supplier engagement such as vendor education sessions and debriefing processes. De-complexify the process of working with a public sector buyer wherever possible. Consider unbundling contracts to make it feasible for local producers to bid. Review the evaluation matrix to ensure values are appropriately reflected in the criteria (for example, are portion size or nutrition density being evaluated).
Difficulty Measuring Carbon Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Measuring carbon emissions can be complex and requires an investment of time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use carbon footprint tracking tools by participating in global climate commitments like the Coolfood Pledge. Progress data on food-related emissions reductions over time will help teams be motivated and engaged in the change process. Have clear contract management reporting roles delineated in your contract and team to ensure progress is being measured and milestones achieved.

²⁷ <https://www.wri.org/research/food-service-playbook-promoting-sustainable-food-choices>

²⁸ <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/>

Committing to the Process

Adopting a step-wise approach, as exemplified by the Coolfood Pledge's "Pledge, Plan, Promote" framework, is instrumental in successfully implementing low-carbon menus.²⁹ Pledging begins with a clear commitment to reducing GHG emissions associated with food services by 25% by 2030, establishing a measurable target that aligns with global climate goals. Following this, organizations engage in strategic planning, utilizing resources like the Coolfood Playbook, which offers a comprehensive list of techniques to encourage the adoption of plant-rich dishes. Planning ensures that the transition to low-carbon is practical and tailored to the organization's unique context. The final step, promoting, involves crafting compelling messaging to engage diners and employees, fostering a culture that supports and sustains these sustainable changes.



²⁹ <https://coolfood.org/pledge/>

Next Steps

To accelerate the transition to low-carbon food procurement, many diverse players must take strategic actions aligned to shared goals. Fostering collaboration, updating key processes, and investing in capacity building will drive meaningful change as public buyers lead the shift toward a more climate-friendly food system.

Next Steps for Procurement Officers	Next Steps for Food Service Teams
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with Food Service Teams developing strategies and targets for low-carbon food procurement. • Strengthen engagement with small and medium-sized food producers and suppliers to encourage participation in public procurement. • Develop forward contracts with local producers to ensure steady supply and reduce reliance on imported food. • Utilize Requests for Information (RFIs) to identify suppliers with low-carbon food options and signal demand to the market. • Update RFPs for food service and grocery contracts to include sustainability priorities, requiring vendors to deliver on low-carbon food strategies. • Incorporate clear evaluation criteria in procurement processes to incentivize suppliers to deliver on sustainable food sourcing. • Reduce procurement of single-use plastics and shift to bulk and reusable packaging where possible. • Require annual progress reports from food service contractors and grocery distributors on sustainability metrics and GHG reductions. • Participate in existing and new communities of practice for public buyers to exchange best practices and support implementation. • Review evaluation criteria to ensure values are appropriately weighted and that the ideal units of measurement are being used. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide culinary training and workshops for food service teams to increase plant-forward menu development skills. • Implement low-carbon menus utilizing guidance in this resource. • Conduct waste audits to track and minimize food waste, packaging, and overproduction. • Strengthen food recovery programs with partnerships. • Engage eaters for feedback through surveys, taste tests, and educational campaigns on low-carbon food benefits. • Participate in existing and new communities of practice for public institutions to exchange best practices and support implementation.

Other Considerations

This resource focuses on carbon, and sustainable menus in public institutions should also consider cultural mindfulness, nutrition, and reducing ultra-processed foods. While meat alternatives can aid the transition to low-carbon menus, prioritizing fresh, whole foods like legumes, whole grains, and vegetables is both healthier and more sustainable than processed substitutes with high environmental footprints. This shift supports lower emissions, better nutrition, local procurement, and culinary creativity.

Sustainable food procurement also involves cultural and ethical considerations, including Indigenous food sovereignty and Truth and Reconciliation goals in Canada. Many Indigenous and culturally significant foods, like moose and foraged berries, are sustainably harvested and essential for community health and identity. Prioritizing diverse, culturally relevant foods ensures public menus reflect and support all Canadians.

Future Directions

To support this transition, all levels of government must set clear low-carbon food procurement objectives that promote sustainable sourcing. Investing in capacity building (including training, as well as participation in new and existing communities of practice) will equip procurement officers and food service teams with the skills to successfully implement low-carbon food initiatives effectively. Infrastructure and value chain investments will enable more local, sustainable food to be served in all public institutions and help build stronger, climate resilient food systems in Canada.

Conclusion

The transition to low-carbon food procurement is both a necessary and achievable step in advancing climate-resilient government and food systems. By integrating evidence-based strategies, aligning with sustainability commitments, and fostering collaboration across sectors, public buyers can significantly reduce their environmental impact through food, while maintaining cost-effectiveness and nutritional adequacy. As more key players recognize the role of food in climate action, ongoing policy support, cross-sector partnerships, and continuous evaluation will be key to scaling these efforts. With the right infrastructure and commitment, low-carbon food procurement can become the standard, driving meaningful progress toward a more sustainable and resilient future.



Appendix A: Policy Trends

Take Inspiration from Global Policy Trends

Canada can look for inspiration from other countries and initiatives that are prioritizing sustainable food procurement by the public sector as a driver for climate action and more resilient food and agricultural systems. A few are highlighted below.

In 2022, the WHO European Region produced a [resource for public procurement officers to guide them in procuring healthy and sustainable food](#), identifying that “Public institutions should lead by example and are important mechanisms for influencing behaviour change. They have a broad reach and are an important policy lever, as they include government and public workplace canteens, hospitals and schools and so on.”

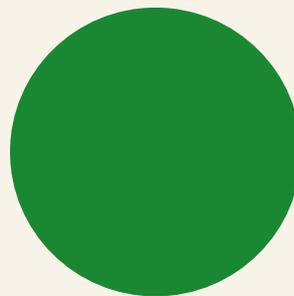
In 2021, the UK’s Department of Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) updated the [Government Buying Standard for food and catering services](#). Mandatory and best practices are identified for: production, processing and distribution (including animal welfare); resource efficiency; and socio-economic. As identified in an [independent review commissioned in 2024 by Sustain](#) (the organic farming organization that runs the Food for Life program that accredits sustainability of 2 million meals per day served in schools, hospitals and the armed forces), there are opportunities for future policy development regarding linking with UK greenhouse gas emissions reductions targets and expanding opportunities for higher-standard UK produce and sourcing from small and medium sized enterprises (SME).

In Denmark, in January 2023, Statens- og Kommunernes Indkøbsservices (SKI) announced a new and greener food agreement. Sustainability has been incorporated in all parts of the agreement, from production and delivery to procurement and use. The agreement covers a wide range of organic foods, as well as a larger assortment of legumes and other plant-based foods. The agreement also sets a number of requirements, i.e. seasonal products, information about climate impact, sustainability and certified palm oil. The agreement is out to tender and is expected to enter into force in March 2024”. This policy is interconnected with others to support innovation and development along the supply chain as part of a comprehensive [Danish Action Plan for Plant-Based Foods](#).

Harness Alignment with Canada's Climate and Sustainability Policies

Advancing low-carbon food procurement by government purchasers aligns with Canada's Net-Zero Commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, helping the country achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. It also supports the Zero Plastic Waste by 2030 initiative by encouraging procurement that minimizes single-use plastics in food packaging and reduces environmental pollution. Additionally, it aligns with the Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change by integrating sustainability and promoting climate-friendly food, which can foster a shift toward a low-carbon economy for the food and agriculture sector.

These activities are further supported by Canada's evolving procurement strategies, including the [Interim National Food and Beverage Procurement Strategy](#) (2019), which seeks to update procurement practices to reflect sustainability and regional considerations. The [Smart Procurement](#) initiative and the Government of Canada's ongoing review of procurement categories signal a commitment to streamlining green purchasing practices, making it easier for institutions to adopt low-carbon food procurement policies. By aligning with these frameworks and leveraging government purchasing power, public buyers can drive market demand for climate-friendly foods while supporting Canada's broader sustainability goals.



Appendix B: Additional Reading

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