

# Sustainable Management of School Canteen

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## Abstract

### Objectives

(1) To provide nutritionally correct meals (National Institute of Nutrition Guidelines), tasty for pupils and from organic sources. (2) To reduce the environmental impact of services and generated waste.

### Method

Changes have been promoted by a group of "organic sensitive" parents who have pursued, through the years, objective no. 1 until they reached the goal of an organic contract tender. The Campolongo administration took on the task to ameliorate the school's canteens, pursuing, with uncommon determination, objective no. 2. The quality of food served in canteens has been constantly monitored in order to reduce leftover food. Strategies for recyclable garbage have been studied and implemented through a partnership project of Federambiente. The distribution food service went through some steps of ameliorative changes: the sealed single portion served in the beginning was replaced by dishing up on single-use plastic kitchenware, replaced later by china, steel, and glass, cleaned in situ. Finally, in 2005 tap water replaced sealed plastic bottles.

### Results

So far, schoolchildren are enjoying canteen services very much, as it is testified to by the ever-decreasing amount of leftover food.

The service costs 15% more than a nonorganic similar service.

The use of nondisposable kitchenware removed the alien plastic smell from food and contributed to creating a familiar lunch setting which promotes a sense of well-being at lunchtime.

The dramatic decrease in environmental impact, due to the use of reusable kitchenware, is certainly no less important than the advantages just mentioned.

### Conclusions

In the past 20 years, the contract system was of the contracted-out type: food was cooked in a central kitchen and then delivered to each school. The Campolongo administration and parents shared some educational programs aimed at increasing awareness and knowledge about sustainable food. Cooperative work brought in, resulting in a big change in the quality of delivered services as well as in the perceived quality. In fact, since 2001 Campolongo supplies schoolchildren with 100% organic ingredients, with an increasing percentage being of Italian origin. Improvement in food went carried along with an improvement in the sustainability of the whole service, including reusable kitchenware, ecological detergent, and use of tap water. The 2006 contract tender was a good tool to (1) reorganize the whole service, including food transportation and distribution, and (2) reach the target of having certified organic meals prepared by certified organic caterers. Benefits are self-evident: reduced leftovers, since food is more appealing, reduced non-recyclable waste and increased separation of organic from other types of waste, since plates are cleared of food before being placed in the dishwasher.

Some results were made possible thanks to careful thinking and joint hard work. Food cleared from plates is given to domestic animals; food that can be used within a few hours (fresh sealed bread, fresh fruit, yogurt) is kept for an afternoon snack. The rest (unused and sealed) is given back to the caterers.

A mid-morning snack, based on fresh bread and fresh fruit, is under study.

Our experience is: "Working together is the key to a sustainable school meal service."

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