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Towards sustainable, healthy and accessible food: lessons from our European neighbours

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In a report produced in collaboration with the German think tank Agora Agriculture and with contributions from nine other partners across Europe ([IDDRI-Agora Agriculture, 2025](#))¹, IDDRI offers an analysis and overview of food policies in Europe. This analysis highlights a series of promising measures and the success factors for implementing them. As France is finalizing its food strategy for 2030, and will soon be reviewing its national nutrition, health and food programmes, this blog post presents the key results of this study and the lessons learned from the Danish, Finnish, Dutch, Polish and Swedish cases (see report containing all the case studies: [IDDRI-Agora Agriculture, 2025](#)), which are particularly relevant to the current French context.

What changes are needed to make food policy more effective?

Food policies, which seek to change eating habits and reduce losses and waste, are essential if we are to meet the many challenges facing our food system. Whether in terms of public health, the environment, Europe's strategic autonomy or dealing with the consequences of recent inflation on food prices, these policies have a crucial role to play. However, in France as elsewhere in Europe, they can lack ambition, resources and coherence.²

To overcome these shortcomings, a real paradigm shift is needed in food policy. Existing information and education tools need to be supplemented by measures to build fair food environments ([IDDRI, 2023](#)). The aim is both to expand the existing actions carried out as part of food policy and to emphasize those that target intermediary players in order to be more effective. And greater coherence is needed between sectors of public action and between levels (from European to local). Our analysis of the French National Strategy for Food, Nutrition and Climate (SNANC), put out to consultation in April 2025 ([IDDRI, 2025](#)), shows that progress has been made on a number of these points, despite significant limitations.

In order to contribute to the discussion on how food policies should evolve, we have analysed public policies and processes in 11 countries across Europe ([IDDRI-Agora Agriculture, 2025](#)). We have identified a series of promising and inspiring measures in the various fields of food policy (from social to health to the environment). Addressing the four dimensions (physical, economic, socio-cultural, cognitive) of food environments, these policies show that it is possible to take action for sustainable, healthy and accessible food.

Each 'country' case study provides an analysis of one or more public policies, and/or the processes involved in developing them. We have chosen here to highlight five cases that are particularly relevant to the current French context.

Poland and Sweden: new ideas for developing a 'public food service'

Social issues are an integral part of any transition policy, and food is no exception. The aim is to find ways of a) increasing access to a chosen diet for all, and b) making healthy, sustainable food more accessible.

Sweden³ offers an interesting case study when it comes to mass catering. Since 1997, children there have been entitled to a free meal in the school canteen. In addition, the meals must follow the [Nordic nutritional recommendations](#) which, since 2023, have included a strong environmental dimension, encouraging them to give priority to plant-based products, consume dairy products in moderate quantities and limit red meat such as poultry. In 2019, as part of a policy to promote organic farming 'from farm to fork', the government set a target of 60% organic produce in canteens by 2030, while consumption in value terms had already reached 39% (the target in France is 20% organic by 2022). The role of a public agency,⁴ as well as ongoing political support for these measures, are identified as success factors in the [IDDRI-Agora Agriculture study](#).

In **Poland**,⁵ the 'milk bar policy' is an essential part of social policy. Milk bars are commercial restaurants subsidized by the government to provide low-cost meals. They can therefore be compared to the French solidarity canteens. Milk bars also accept social vouchers and promote social diversity. What makes them special is the scale of this policy: milk bars are supported directly by the government (with a budget of €2.5 million in 2024) and not mainly by local authorities; they form a denser network than in France (around 40 in Warsaw); and they have acquired much greater cultural status.

In the French context, these policies are interesting not just in themselves, but also because of the underlying philosophy, i.e. the creation of a *public food service* aimed at increasing the number of places where healthy, sustainable food is made available to everyone at low cost. It is therefore not just a question of improving existing

food aid (diversifying the methods and improving the offer), but also a matter of strengthening existing public services (canteens, aid in kind, social and solidarity grocery shops, etc.) both financially (in line with the [Eat Better for All plan](#)) and operationally (e.g. opening school canteens to everyone in the evening). In this context, meal vouchers, which currently only benefit employees, with no added nutritional or environmental value, could also be redesigned, as proposed by the French SNANC.[6](#)

Finland: changing dietary habits, with local stakeholders

The **North Karelia** project[7](#) is a model for promoting healthy eating. Faced with high mortality rates from coronary heart disease, linked in particular to too much fat and too little fruit and vegetables, the Finnish government launched a pilot project to transform the eating habits of the region's inhabitants, with convincing results. The key to success: combined action on the cognitive, physical and socio-cultural environments at regional and national level, facilitated by local and then national political mobilization.

The project began by training local communities (women's associations, local opinion leaders [e.g. members of associations or trade unions], health professionals and local businesses) in good practice. Collaboration has also been established with the industrial sector (bakery, milk, delicatessen, vegetable oils) to encourage the redesign of recipes for products already on the market and to develop new ones, as well as with the agricultural sector to promote certain crops. Finally, public prevention campaigns have been organized and a strong presence in the media ensured.

In the French context, this example shows the value of coordinated action on several dimensions of the food environment, as well as pilot actions carried out on a regional scale, when they are also supported by national measures. The reinforcement of the territorial food projects (PAT) policy, and the measures aiming at redesigning industrial products (for health and environmental objectives), already included in the SNANC, are a step in the right direction. The next step would be to pick a priority that can unite stakeholders in promoting a coherent policy package *via* these different avenues, and to add action on the socio-cultural environment. Should we make food the next major national cause, [as the French Economic, Social and Environmental Council suggests?](#)

Denmark and the Netherlands: a 'fork to farm' strategy for plants

Promoting a more plant-based diet is an essential lever for achieving a range of collective objectives (health, environment, strategic autonomy, etc.). The Netherlands and Denmark are in the vanguard here.

In 2020, the **Netherlands**[8](#) published a National Protein Strategy which set a target of 50% plant-based protein in the Dutch diet by 2030 (up from 43% in 2023) and proposed measures to achieve this. On the government side, this has translated into strong support for alternative proteins in terms of research, regulatory ecosystem and investment. In addition, the announcement of this target has helped rally private players such as retailers,[9](#) most of whom have set a target of 60% plant-based protein sales. The Dutch Ministry of Agriculture has publicly supported this declaration and indicated that it would monitor the implementation of the measures, as have the NGOs with which the retailers have signed up. While the measures remain preliminary, they are a step in the right direction, benefiting from the various levers available to retailers (placement, promotion, prices, products).

In **Denmark**,[10](#) a broad political agreement concluded in 2021 set a greenhouse gas emission reduction target for the agricultural and forestry sector, opening the door to measures to enable the transition from production to consumption. In 2023, Denmark launched a Plant Innovation Fund with a budget of €140 million for the period 2025-2030. The same year, a Plant Action Plan and a Strategy for Green Proteins in Food and Feed were adopted to

reinforce government measures aimed at the various players in the food chain.

In the French context, these examples show that it is possible to develop plant-based protein value chains and encourage commitment to the issue. The measures concerning the retail and catering sectors in the SNANC, which focus solely on promoting sustainable products, could provide an opportunity to develop this approach.

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Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden for the European Union, as well as the United Kingdom and Switzerland.

2

This observation is consistent with that made by other institutions in recent reports, such as the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC), the European Environment Agency (EEA) and the European Commission's Group of Senior Scientific Advisers (SAM). On the whole, food policies are: a) fragmented and sometimes contradictory, which reduces their effectiveness; b) concentrated at both ends of the food chain, with insufficient involvement of industry, retailers and caterers; c) insufficiently equipped to promote changes in food consumption, relying mainly on ineffective measures such as consumer information and education; d) insufficiently coherent between different levels.

3

Wiklund, J., Virgin, I., Fogde, M. (2025). Case study Sweden in *Towards food policies that support healthy and sustainable consumption. Case studies from 11 European countries highlighting good practices for demand-side policies*.

4

The Swedish Competence Centre for Public Meals.

5

Wrona, A. (2025). Case study Poland in *Towards food policies that support healthy and sustainable consumption. Case studies from 11 European countries highlighting good practices for demand-side policies*.

6

On this subject, see IDDRI's work on the 'food voucher' ([IDDRI, 2022](#)), or the recent [bill proposal by MP B. Tavernier](#).

7

Institut national de santé publique du Québec (2012). Le projet de la Carélie du Nord en Finlande : un mouvement de société en faveur des saines habitudes de vie. *TOPO*. <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/cd-mc/cvd-mcv/index-fra.php> ; Sillanauke, O., Minkkilä, R., Lähteenoja, S. (2025). Case study Finland in *Towards food policies that support healthy and sustainable consumption. Case studies from 11 European countries highlighting good practices for demand-side policies*.

8

Bos-Brouwers, H., Stroosnijder, S. (2025). Case study The Netherlands in *Towards food policies that support healthy and sustainable consumption. Case studies from 11 European countries highlighting good practices for demand-side policies*.

9

The analysis of the retail sector's commitment to plant-based products is provided by Dagevos, H. (2025). It does take more than the power of the supermarket. Wageningen University and Research: Periodic Nature Policy Review. (*Automatic translation from Dutch*).

10

Minter, M., Bach Johansen, A., Højte, S. (2025). Case study Denmark in *Towards food policies that support healthy and sustainable consumption. Case studies from 11 European countries highlighting good practices for demand-side policies.*