

# Public Sector Healthy Food Procurement- A review to identify best practice



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## **Abstract**

In Ireland there is no healthy food procurement policy in place for the public sector. A public sector healthy procurement policy would aim to encourage public bodies to serve food that meets objectives on issues such as health, nutrition and waste. In 2009, the Health Service Executive (HSE) commissioned the National Nutrition Surveillance Centre (NNSC) to review the area of public sector healthy food procurement policies. Several countries have in place procurement policies for the public sector and this review considers the food procurement initiatives from these countries with particular focus on the UK and discusses best practice for the implementation of a healthy food procurement policy for Ireland. Within the UK the Public Sector Food Procurement Initiative (PSFPI) was launched in 2003. This initiative was recently evaluated and many of the key issues point to areas of good practice and also highlight many of the problems encountered. Based on the findings from the UK experience it is important that several recommendations be addressed when considering a healthy food procurement policy for Ireland. This review found that there are in place many policies and initiatives within Ireland which promote healthy eating in the public sector. However, a more 'joined up' approach is required to implement a public sector food procurement policy on a national basis. A regulatory framework for the Initiative would need to be developed to ensure a high level of support and a strong steer from government and that extensive training and direction be given to procurement officers working in this area. It is also important to develop Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the evaluation of initiatives taken from a public sector food procurement policy.

## Public Sector Healthy Food Procurement

### Introduction

The introduction of a Public Sector Healthy Food Procurement Initiative would be an ideal opportunity to encourage public bodies to serve food that meets objectives on issues such as health, nutrition and waste. The millions of meals served up in Irish hospitals, schools, prisons, council, public sector and government canteens could play a role in providing healthy safe food as well as incorporating other important issues such as sustainability and provide a future for Irish farming.

The importance of good nutrition has long been recognised to ensure that the body functions well, both physically and psychologically. A good diet provides an adequate supply of energy, ensures that the body has the ability to work effectively and to repair and heal itself when ill and also aids psychological well-being. The long term consequences of a poor diet may result in chronic diseases. These diseases which are largely preventable include obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, cancer, and osteoporosis. They currently account for approximately 60% of deaths worldwide and present a growing burden for society<sup>1</sup>.

Obesity is recognised as a major epidemic and public health problem among adults in Ireland. It is known to increase the risk of cardiovascular disease (CVD), type 2 diabetes, hypertension, cancer, osteoarthritis, infertility, respiratory problems, some cancers, birth complications, sleep apnoea and psychological disorders<sup>2</sup>. Obesity and its associated diseases have a profound impact on morbidity and mortality figures as well as costs to the economy. In Ireland, 23% of adults are obese and 38% are overweight<sup>3</sup>. This poses a particular threat to the population given that Ireland has a high mortality from cardiovascular disease relative to other European countries. Approximately 10,000 people die each year from CVD – including coronary heart disease (CHD), stroke and other circulatory diseases<sup>4</sup>.

Obese people are 18% more likely to be hospitalised than their normal weight counterparts and type 2 diabetes is the most common medical consequence of obesity<sup>5</sup>. Type 2 diabetes is known to reduce life expectancy by 8-10 years and is an enormous cost on the health service as it is expensive to treat<sup>5</sup>. Obesity is also a known risk for several common cancers and about 30% of these are associated with a poor diet. In Ireland over 7,500 people die each year as a result of this disease<sup>4</sup>.

The health of children is also an important issue. Their dietary needs for energy and nutrients are higher than adults as they are rapidly growing and developing. Children's diets need to be balanced – rich in fruit, vegetables and starchy foods. Their requirements for salt are lower than for adults and therefore it is important to avoid children eating too much processed food. It is also important for them to avoid eating too many sugary and fatty snacks as this may cause dental decay and may lead to overweight or obesity.

In 2002, the North South Survey<sup>6</sup> established baseline data on the prevalence of overweight and obesity among 4 to 16 year olds. The prevalence of overweight and obesity in boys was 23% and in girls it was 28%<sup>6</sup>. The National Children's Food Survey<sup>7</sup> conducted between 2003 and 2004 reported that the prevalence of obesity in boys ranged from 4.1 to 11.2% and in girls from 9.3 to 16.3% depending on which method was used. This represents a two to fourfold increase in obesity in children aged 8-12 years since 1990, again depending on the definition of obesity used<sup>7</sup>. The National Taskforce on Obesity<sup>8</sup>, reported that over 300,000 children are estimated to be overweight and obese and this is projected to increase annually by 10,000<sup>9</sup>.

This is a major public health concern as it has been shown that eating patterns developed during childhood tend to be continued into adulthood and therefore may have lifelong consequences of ill-health<sup>10</sup>. Such is the concern about obesity in Ireland that the Minister for Health and Children appointed a National Task Force to review obesity trends in Ireland and make health promoting policy recommendations designed to address this<sup>8</sup>.

Nutritional status is very important among the elderly within Ireland. A good diet ensures the prevention of ill-health and faster recovery times from acute illness. As the Irish population is aging (expected to reach 14.1% in 2011) a good nutritional status will be of particular importance in determining the quality of life for these elderly. As people age there are physiological and pathological changes which occur which relate to nutrition. Physiological changes may include changes to gastrointestinal function and body and bone mass composition<sup>11</sup>. Additionally, immune and cognitive function may decline which may relate to inadequate diets<sup>11</sup>. These may occur together with pathological changes of visual and mobility deterioration, depression and acute illness. Furthermore, the elderly living within institutions have been shown to be particularly vulnerable to deficiencies in Vitamin B, C and D<sup>12</sup>. Under-nutrition is also particularly prevalent among the elderly within hospitals and often goes un-recognised upon admission and is likely to deteriorate further as a result of catabolism associated with acute illness<sup>12</sup>.

It is clear that nutrition plays a very important part in the health of Irish people today. Children require a healthy balanced diet to ensure their physical and psychological development and to prevent illness later in life. A poor diet has been shown to be associated with high early mortality rates due to chronic illness among adults and may also have serious consequences for the quality of life among the elderly and decrease their recovery time from acute illness. In addition, ill-health as it relates to nutrition impacts on the costs to the Irish economy in terms of longer hospital stays and increased costs to treat chronic illness. For this reason, it is important that the public sector acts as a role model in the provision of nutritious food for all of its customers to ensure long term value for money objectives as outlined in the public sector food procurement initiative.

International institutions such as the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation, the World Health Organisation and the Codex Alimentarius Commission are increasingly focussing on food policy including the Second European Action Plan for Food and Nutrition Policy agreed in 2006<sup>13</sup>. Several countries have developed food policies that relate to food procurement in

the public sector including the UK, Scotland and Italy. This review will consider food procurement initiatives from these countries and discuss best practice for the implementation of a healthy food procurement policy for Ireland.

### **Public Sector Food Procurement Initiative (PSFPI) in the UK**

The UK has a number of policies that relate to food- including production such as agricultural and environmental policy or consumption such as policy to promote safe food or improving health. However, in policy terms these were rarely inter-related. Policies relating to better health through good food are distributed through a range of evidence-based, health related reports and position papers, public service frameworks and agreements and other expert documents. Over recent years, there has been an increasing emphasis on nutrition and public health and government investment in nutrition research, policy and education as well as engaging with the food industry. Food policy in the UK has shifted from focussing on informing consumers and encouraging them to make better choices to one which considers the wider implications of food marketing, food availability and sustainability as well as the introduction of clearer standards applied to food in the public sector.

In the UK, the government spends over £2 billion annually providing food and catering services to hospitals, schools, prisons and the Ministry of Defence as well as providing facilities for staff in Government offices<sup>14</sup>. The Public Sector Food Procurement Initiative (PSFPI) was launched under the UK Government's Strategy for Sustainable Farming of Food by the Department of the Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) in 2003. This is led by DEFRA and aims to deliver a sustainable farming and food sector, contribute to a better environment and healthier communities. According to DEFRA<sup>15</sup>,

*'The Government wants buyers and their internal customers to use this buying power to help deliver the principle aims of the Government's Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food in England'*

In the UK the following departments and agencies are involved in the public food procurement process:

- - The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)
- - The Department of Health
- - The Office of Government Commerce (OGC)
- - National Audit Office (NAO)
- - Public Accounts Committee (PAC)
- - Food Standards Agency (FSA)

In order to provide co-ordination for the initiative several cross government groups were established and these are directed by the Food Procurement Implementation Group. Their main role is to take forward the Government policies on health, food, farming and sustainability in the public procurement of food and catering services and to promote and oversee the implementation of the PSFPI across the public sector. This group includes key procurement and policy officials from across government departments and includes representatives from local government.

**The PSFPI's priority objectives are<sup>16</sup>:**

- To promote food safety, including high standards of hygiene.
- To improve the sustainability and efficiency of production, processing and distribution.
- To increase tenders for small and local producers and their ability to do business with the public sector.
- To increase the consumption of healthy and nutritious food.
- To improve the sustainability and efficiency of public sector food procurement and catering services.
- Increase co-operation among buyers, producers and along supply chains.



Other important objectives include consumer behaviour, organic food, animal welfare, fair trade, animal welfare, fair treatment of suppliers, working conditions for catering staff and catering for ethnic and minority groups.

The role of the PSFPI is to raise awareness of the initiative and provide guidelines and tools to assist the public sector to meet the objectives outlined above. This is a cross-governmental programme with various bodies promoting collaboration in food procurement.

As mentioned, The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) have taken the lead on this initiative and have produced a variety of documents and guidelines for those working in procurement in the public sector and highlights practical ways to meet these objectives<sup>16, 17</sup>. This has included the setting up of a website with practical information and guidelines together with toolkits for those working in the public sector. Documents such as 'Public Sector Food Procurement Initiative: Putting it into practice: Advice for promoting healthy food and improving the sustainability and efficiency of food procurement, catering services and supply have been produced<sup>16</sup>.

Achievements of the Food Procurement Implementation Group (FPIG) to date include<sup>18</sup>:

The development of a comprehensive PSFPI website

A more joined up government

A communications strategy

Regional projects to develop the demand and supply sides and good links into food farming and voluntary sectors

More recently in the UK, public interest has focussed on the need for healthy and safe food, particularly in relation to school meals and the growing problems of obesity. The initiatives

that are being implemented are centred on the introduction of healthier foods but also take into account the importance of food sustainability.

### **Successful Case Studies of the PSFPI within a hospital, school and local authorities**

There have been examples of successful case studies of the implementation of the PSFPI within hospitals, schools and among local authorities<sup>18</sup>. Nottingham City Hospital has realigned its catering plan to incorporate the initiatives of the PSFPI; they now procure over 30% of their food from local producers and have build up a successful chain of fair trade cafes within their hospitals and the city. They are also currently working to install a centralised, carbon neutral kitchen which will aid the local economy and will significantly reduce food miles.

Bradford Council's school meals organisation, the Education Contract Services have carried out work to obtain most of their supplies from local sources. They now have better quality school meals at no extra cost. This was achieved by simplifying their menus, reducing the use of processed food, improving product specifications and adapting to seasonal availability and using fresh meat from local butchers. They have also streamlined their packaging and delivery arrangements.

Four local authorities in the north east of England have implemented a public sector procurement programme. This has demonstrated how collaboration among local authorities can bring about the objectives of the PSFPI in respect to improvement to the efficiency and sustainability of their food supply chain. This collaboration has successfully incurred savings by eliminating the use of multiple tender processes by the individual authorities. In addition, procurers have established better relationships with their suppliers to incorporate efficiency and sustainability objectives and reduced the barriers which may have prevented small and medium sized suppliers from attaining local authority procurement contracts. They have also

improved their service provision and introduced e-Procurement to previously resistant suppliers.

### **Evaluation of the Public Sector Food Procurement Initiative in the UK**

In 2009 an evaluation report on the PSFPI was published<sup>18</sup>. Its main aim was to report on the achievements of the initiative to date, limitations and recommendations on future work. This independent evaluation was carried out by Deloitte who first carried out a literature review on the understanding of the scheme and its associated policies and strategies. A qualitative and quantitative survey of over 50 procurement practitioners in local authorities, government departments, schools, prisons and hospitals was carried out to gather information about public sector food procurement. Semi-structured interviews with strategic stakeholders were used to discuss key issues and provide an opportunity to discuss the future of the initiative.

Awareness of the initiative had increased although uptake was limited. It was found that although the public sector were aware of the initiative, issues such as low priority to food and lack of appreciation of the scheme combined with insufficient knowledge and use of the guidelines available resulted in low uptake of the scheme. This was reinforced by the stakeholders who supported the objectives of the initiative but had concerns about the practicability of achieving the objectives. Those who were implementing the objectives of the initiative found that the PSFPI guidance and support was very useful. However, several other limitations were highlighted including limited collaboration between buyers, suppliers, distributors and wholesalers and those working as procurement practitioners felt that they required more training and hands on support. There was also a perception among procurement practitioners that implementing the PSFPI is costly and that sustainability and efficiency cannot be achieved across all objectives. Evidence from case studies would suggest that implementation of the PSFPI does not have to increase costs although it does

require investment of time and resources. This was another limitation highlighted by the evaluation in that the PSFPI relies on enthusiastic individuals for its success. Most of the tools provided by the PSFPI are static resources in the form of online tools and guidance that tend to be used by skilled and motivated individuals. Since the initiative has no regulatory framework many of the procurement officers interviewed felt that they would not undertake voluntary measures to implement many of the objectives, particularly when cost was a higher priority. In summarising the evaluation, the authors of the report recognised that the PSFPI had made commendable achievements with the limited resources available they had 'piggy-backed' on several other initiatives. Some areas of best practice were identified but several recommendations for the future success of the initiative were outlined. These included that DEFRA should retain lead for sustainable food as a policy issue and with the public sector food procurement while the OGC collaborative food strategy should provide the overarching governance structure for the management and delivery of improved public sector food procurement. Other departments and organisations should work alongside DEFRA to meet the objectives and that a series of key performance indicators (KPIs) should be created and built into an evaluation stream for the programme. Training and hands on support along with clearer definitions of key terms (example: the meaning of the term local food) should be provided to encourage more widespread uptake of food procurement across the public sector.

### **Future Directions for the UK**

Food Matters: Towards a Strategy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century<sup>19</sup> was published in 2008 by the Cabinet Office. This publication reviews the main trends in food production and consumption in the UK, analyses how current food trends are likely to impact on the economy, society and environment and determines objectives for future food strategies. Several recommendations were made and in the area of food procurement in the public sector it was suggested to

develop a Healthier Food Mark for public sector catering to encourage provision of healthier food in hospitals, government departments and prisons. This will be used to highlight where public sector caterers are providing healthier, lower impact food and will build on existing Food Standard Agency and other guidance. The initial focus of the Mark will be on meeting general guidelines on food (eg servings of fruit and vegetables, meat and fish), macronutrients (fat and added sugar) and salt. Caterers will also be asked to meet agreed environmental standards as part of the Mark's criteria. The Food Matters strategy also advocated integrating information and advice for consumers on the impacts of food on health and the environment as well as making further progress with campaigns such as the 5 A DAY campaign to increase average daily intakes of fruit and vegetables. The Cabinet Office plans to establish and support a Food Strategy Task Force to drive forward these recommendations<sup>20</sup>.

### **Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – Actions towards Public Sector Procurement Initiatives.**

To date the Scottish Government has taken forward initiatives to aid the procurement of healthy sustainable food in the public sector<sup>21, 22</sup>. They have published an organic food action plan which gave payment incentives for organic farming and developed organic standards<sup>23</sup>. They have also produced guidelines entitled 'Integrating sustainable development into procurement of food and catering services'<sup>24</sup> which aims to help public purchasers and caterers to implement sustainable development, healthy eating and fair trade objectives when awarding their food contracts. Furthermore, they have drawn on the work of DEFRA and have piloted the practical application of their guidelines and disseminated the lessons learnt from doing so.

In addition to the application of DEFRA guidelines, Scotland has implemented initiatives within their NHS and Prison Service. The Scottish NHS has incorporated a Standard for

Food & Nutritional Care within their hospitals and care homes which insure that a plan of nutritional care is carried out for each admitted patient<sup>22</sup>. The Scottish Prison Service aims to provide adequate and nutritious food and offer a balanced diet and is working towards national targets contained within 'The Health Promoting Prison: A Framework for Promoting Health in the Scottish Prison Service'<sup>25</sup>. All catering managers have been trained in nutrition and they are in the early stages of developing nutritional standards for prison food and are considering appointing a nutritional advisor to help take forward this work.

In 2009, the Scottish Government published its first National Food and Drink Policy<sup>21</sup>. An objective within this policy is to ensure that public sector food procurement becomes excellent for sustainable economic growth in terms of quality, health and well-being, affordability and sustainability. The Scottish Government has also produced a series of good practice guides and toolkits too provide producers, suppliers, buyers and catering staff with clear practical guidance framework to aid the procurement of healthy sustainable food in the public sector. Additionally a report<sup>22</sup> was published in 2009, 'Public Sector Food Procurement in Scotland: An Overview of Current Evidence'. It makes recommendations similar to the PSFPI – An Evaluation Report.

Wales is currently developing a new Quality of Food Strategy<sup>26</sup> and Northern Ireland has had a strategy focussing on food and activity for young people since 2006<sup>27</sup>.

## **Italy**

Italy has a history of sustainable food procurement<sup>28</sup> that goes back to the mid-1980s. Examples include organic meals in schools, hospitals, and university canteens in various Italian cities, as well as emphasis in some locations on traditional Mediterranean foods. A key part of its approach relates to education and this includes teaching children about the seasonality of foods.

## **Australia & New Zealand**

There is no national regulation of government procurement within Australia. Each local authority has its own procurement legislation, policies and procedures. As with other countries the core principle of public procurement is value for money. Competition is a key element of the procurement policy framework and includes fair access for small and medium enterprises. The Department of Finance has brought in e-Procurement and is currently working to bring out a framework which aims to provide improved coordination of government purchasing<sup>29</sup>. The Australian Government are currently promoting Australian produce, funding organic food projects and have set up a Food Regulation System with New Zealand<sup>30</sup>. This is a joint food standards system aimed to enhance public health and safety. Australia and New Zealand also have a Food Regulation Ministerial Council<sup>31</sup>; they have the role of the development of domestic food policy guidelines which aim to produce and deliver food to the public efficiently with minimal regulation. The Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply<sup>32</sup> (CIPS) is the industry body for the procurement in Australia and New Zealand. They are dedicated to promoting best-practice, continuous improvement in professional standards and raising awareness of the contribution that procurement and supply management can make to organisations.

## **A public sector healthy food procurement policy for Ireland?**

Food and diet have a huge impact upon health. The direct links are widely recognised and the prevention of diet-related diseases and obesity are a priority (as set out, for example, in the National Taskforce on Obesity<sup>8</sup>). There are major possibilities for improving health by influencing the food purchasing and procurement policies of public bodies by using the purchasing capacity of the public sector to provide healthy, balanced meals which, in the long-term, will help improve the nation's health.

In Ireland, the annual public procurement market for goods, services and works is valued at approximately €15 billion<sup>33</sup>. Public contracts are most often awarded on the 'most economically advantageous tender' (MEAT) criterion, rather than the lowest price<sup>33</sup>.

Many Government Departments have procurement policies in place including: the Department of Finance, the Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Food, the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment, the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) and the Department of Health and Children, including the HSE. These procurement policies are based on the National Public Procurement Policy Framework<sup>34</sup> which was launched by the National Public Procurement Policy Unit (NPPU) in 2005, and includes a primary focus on the implementation of a Corporate Procurement Plan within central and local authorities; the inclusion of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in public sector procurement, the aggregation of public sector institutions to increase their purchasing power and an increase in the production of organic food and improvements to environmental issues.

In relation to nutrition, food safety and health, many policies, reports, recommendations and frameworks have been developed for Ireland. The following section reviews the current situation in Ireland.

### **Providing nutritious and safe food**

The Department of Health and Children have policies which incorporate health and how it relates to nutrition. In 2000 they published a 'Health Services Procurement Policy'<sup>35</sup> which was aimed at the procurement of materials and services within their hospitals. They have also published 'Food and Nutrition Guidelines'<sup>36</sup> document for pre-school services in 2004 which served as a commitment to the serving of 'sufficient nutritious and varied food' to every pre-school child from 0-5 years. In addition the 'Food and Nutritional Care in Hospitals – Guidelines for Preventing Under-Nutrition in Acute Hospitals'<sup>37</sup> were published in 2009 as



part of their Hospital Food Programme. Similar Guidelines are to be established for Children's hospitals and Long-Stay Institutions.

In 2006 the HSE launched a procurement policy<sup>38</sup> which outlines their responsibilities in spending in the health sector in terms of both cost and quality and the use of purchasing power to streamline the processes and make their budgets go further. This purchasing power has in some cases been used to contract healthier food in the health sector. An example of this was is shown in recent years within the former HSE Eastern Region<sup>39</sup>; there has been a decrease in the purchase of frozen foods and red meat combined with an increase in the purchase of fresh fruit, vegetables, fish and chicken. These initiatives were carried out by procurement officers who engage regularly with their catering officers, and warehouse and distribution officers regarding the types of produce needed. They have also explained the tendering process and contracts to their suppliers in approximately 80 sites, including hospitals, health boards, nursing homes. Customers of public sector catering services include the general public and many vulnerable groups such as the ill, the elderly and the young. Food safety is therefore a major management issue and Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP) is widely adopted to ensure safe operation. This is a time consuming process and there are many challenges particularly if the number of suppliers is increased and includes those operating on a small scale with less formal technical and management systems. The Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) is responsible for ensuring that all reasonable steps to ensure that food produced, distributed or marketed in the State meets the highest standards of food safety and hygiene reasonably available. The FSAI also aims to ensure that food complies with legal requirements, or where appropriate with recognised codes of good practice<sup>40</sup>.

The establishment of the National Taskforce on Obesity<sup>8</sup> (NTFO) is viewed as the most important, fundamental step that the government has taken to progress the battle against obesity, particularly in children. The NTFO was established to oversee the national obesity strategy. They published 'Obesity – The Policy Challenges' in 2005<sup>8</sup>. This report highlights

93 recommendations for change, across six sectors of: high-level government; education; social and community; health; food, commodities, production and supply and the physical environment. In 2009 the Department of Health and Children (DoHC) published the 'Report of Inter-sectoral Group on the Implementation of the recommendations of the National Taskforce on Obesity' which highlights the progress made to date of each of the 93 recommendations<sup>41</sup>. Several of these recommendations relate to the area of public procurement and illustrate that work is already in progress which could ultimately contribute to a national public sector procurement policy for Ireland.

One of the 93 recommendations of the NTFO was for all state agencies and government departments to develop prioritise and evaluate schemes and policies (including public procurement) that encourage healthy eating and active living especially those aimed at children and vulnerable groups. It was recommended that the health services in particular should advocate and lead change to create environments that support healthy food choices. To date the Department of Health and Children have almost completed the development of the first National Nutrition Policy (due later this year). They, together with the Department of Education and Science, have also developed 'Healthy Eating Guidelines for both pre-school and primary schools<sup>36</sup> (post-primary guidelines are to be published shortly). In addition they are working with the Department of Social and family affairs to draw up literature for healthy food choices for the School Food Programme.

The National Taskforce on Obesity<sup>8</sup> has recommended that a Healthy Nutrition Programme be established by the health services, the appropriate food agencies and the catering institutions to ensure that all catering facilities provide healthy options. To date 70 HSE facilities, including hospitals, long stay institutions and administration offices have been awarded the Irish Heart Foundation's 'Happy Heart Healthy Eating Award'. This certifies the provision of healthy food choices which are low in fat, sugar and salt and high in fruit, vegetable and fibre for staff and visitors. The Department of Health and Children in association with the Health Promoting Hospitals and the Irish Heart Foundation have also

developed the 'Healthcare Food Award'. This award includes an assessment of food hygiene as well as healthy food choices. It has been awarded to two hospitals and includes nutritional guidelines for patients.

Further healthy eating incentives have been put in place within the health, defence and prison sectors. The HSE has successfully implemented a Salt Reduction Procurement Programme in the Eastern region<sup>41</sup>. It currently plans to expand this programme to all HSE facilities and may be a model used for central purchasing and product specification in areas such as sugar and fat reduction. To date the Irish Defence Force has amended their procurement of salt products<sup>42</sup> - they have requested information and pricing on low salt alternatives to all of their products and are currently purchasing these alternatives. As they are a large purchaser of food, their support for low salt food will help to promote the sourcing of low salt food options amongst suppliers. This may also be extended to other public sector institutions, for example, the army, prisons and the Gardai. In addition to the salt procurement programme, the HSE have provided support for healthy food choices in the menu planning process within Mountjoy, St. Patrick's Institution and Wheatfield prisons. Furthermore, prison staff are trained on the 'Being Well Programme' in Wheatfield which aims to encourage healthy eating<sup>41</sup>.

Contract caterers within the public sector have also brought about incentives for healthy eating. They have their own guidelines for healthy food provision and many of them are seeking to certify their canteens for their clients through the attainment of the 'Happy Heart Healthy Eating Award'. Furthermore, nutritional training has been carried out within Catering Colleges<sup>41</sup>. To date some of the Catering Training Colleges throughout Ireland have undertaken training in healthy food choices with the IHF and the HSE in the North East and Midlands<sup>41</sup>. The FAS funded Community Training Centres are also working with the IHF to develop an award programme similar to the 'Happy Heart Healthy Eating Award' and there are plans to incorporate healthy catering practices into their catering and nutrition modules of their curriculum<sup>41</sup>.

The National Taskforce on Obesity<sup>8</sup> recommended that the Department of Agriculture and Food review policies in partnership with other government departments to promote access to healthy food. These policies were to encourage the provision of grants and funding to local industry in favour of healthy products and to actively promote access to healthy food. The 'Report of the Inter-sectoral Group on the Implementation of the Recommendations of the National Taskforce on Obesity'<sup>41</sup> states that this is not possible due to 'legal constraints' under EU legislation as positive discrimination is not allowable in public procurement. However, the as highlighted in the PSFPI<sup>16</sup> it states that there is scope to promote the provision of healthy foods with the public sector and still work within EU competition legislation through the tendering process.

Another recommendation by the National Taskforce on Obesity<sup>8</sup> was for the Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Food (DAFF) together with the Department of Health and Children to promote the implementation of evidence-based healthy eating interventions. To date they have funded a number of research programmes. Through An Bord Bia they have rolled out the 'Food Dudes Programme' to 1,000 primary schools. This programme is rated highly by the EU and won a WHO award in 2006. It uses repeat tasting, role models and awards to promote fruit and vegetable consumption<sup>41</sup>. In addition to this programme DAFF is co-sponsoring through An Bord Bia an initiative entitled 'Incredible Edibles'. This aims to educate primary school children to grow vegetables and through their projects inform them of the importance of fruit and vegetables in a healthy diet. DAFF's is also working with industry groups through its public good food research programme which is funding a number of projects on reducing the salt content of bakery, convenience and ethnic foods<sup>41</sup>.

## **Nutrition Guidelines**

In recent years, there has been increasing emphasis on nutrition in public health and several sets of guidelines have been published. Guidelines on nutrition standards are an essential part of developing a healthy food procurement policy.

### **Pre-school Nutritional Guidelines**

Pre-school childcare services in Ireland are regulated by law under the 'Child Care Act 1991'<sup>43</sup>. Under this Act the HSE are responsible for ensuring the health, safety and welfare of pre-school children attending the services of pre-schools, play groups, day nurseries, crèches and other similar services responsible for the care of more than 3 pre-school children. Each pre-school service is responsible for ensuring that sufficient nutritious and suitable food is offered to each pre-school child and that they have suitable facilities to provide this food.

In 2004, the Department of Health and Children issued 'Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Pre-School Services'<sup>36</sup>. This advises that children in care for more than 5 hours per session should be offered at least 2 meals, one of which should be a hot meal and 2 snacks. The HSE is responsible for the inspection and regulation of pre-school child care services.

### **Primary School Nutritional Guidelines**

In 2003 the Department of Health and Children published 'Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Primary Schools'<sup>44</sup> which are part of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) Teacher's Guidelines. This resource was designed to be used for the development of Healthy School Food Policies. It aims to promote nutrition awareness and positively affect healthy eating among school age children. It has two main objectives; the first is to promote healthy eating habits and a healthy body image among school children and young people and the second is to facilitate the implementation of Health Education and Health Promotion

Programmes. These guidelines are essentially a training resource for community dietitians and health promotion teams and in particular those involved in the in-service training of teachers and other relevant groups within the school setting, for example, home school community liaison officers and parent councils.

The Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Primary Schools states that healthy eating messages should include five points: how food and nutrition are important for growth and development; variety, balance and moderation (the food groups and different nutrients); food hygiene; food choices and factors influencing these; food with respect to health, illness and special conditions<sup>44</sup>.

### **Nutritional Guidelines for Adults/General Population/Older People**

The Irish Heart Foundation published 'Nutrition Guidelines for Heart Health' in 2007<sup>45</sup>. This document includes nutritional guidelines as they relate to ensuring heart health, for example, to reduce saturated fat, increase fruit and vegetable intake, decrease salt and ensure a BMI within the normal range. In addition to this, there are also nutritional guidelines in relation to specific groups of people. There are nutritional guidelines for maternal nutrition and childhood nutritional guidelines for specific age groups, under 2years, 2-5years and above 5years of age. Furthermore, it includes nutritional guidelines for older people as they relate to specific requirements in later life.

In addition to the nutritional guidelines published by the IHF, the Department of Health and Children has published 'Healthy Catering Guidelines' in 2004<sup>46</sup>. This publication incorporates nine 'Health Eating Guidelines' which include: variety with use of the healthy eating pyramid, portion control, fruit and vegetable intake, increase in complex carbohydrates and fibre, decrease in fat intake, alcohol and snack foods. Each of these Healthy Eating Guidelines is discussed with practical examples to bring about their implementation.

The FSAI's Nutrition Sub-Group has carried out a review of Healthy Eating Guidelines. They have now submitted this review to the Department of Health and Children which has undergone user testing and has a view to launch in 2009<sup>40</sup>. The Food Pyramid is being updated as part of this review as it is believed to be slightly out-dated, however, the basic healthy eating messages are not expected to change.

The FSAI have also published a report entitled 'Recommendations for a National Food and Nutrition Policy for Older People'<sup>47</sup>. This report highlights areas that they believe are important for consideration within such a policy, these include: dietary guidelines (to be made available to older people – to aid their food choices); supportive environments – for example, transport, housing, income (which affect access to health food choices); community action to aid better nutrition for older people; health services – within hospitals and care homes to include a nutritional support system for older people.

## **Food Safety**

The European Commission's food legislation<sup>48</sup> aims to ensure a high level of protection of human life and health and takes into account the protection of animal health and welfare, plant health and the environment. To ensure food safety the EC has legislation on food marketing, food standards, the labelling of food, food imports, genetically modified foods, control measures for the prevention of BSE and Salmonella and limits on pesticide residues. The EC Regulation establishes the principle that the primary responsibility for ensuring compliance with food law, and in particular the safety of food, rests with food businesses. To complement and support this principle, adequate and effective controls are organised by the competent authorities of the EU Member States.

The Food Safety Authority of Ireland<sup>40</sup> is the single, regulatory authority with responsibility for the enforcement of food safety legislation in Ireland. The FSAI legislation section covers Irish and International Food Acts and Laws. Most of Ireland's food legislation derives from its

membership of the EU. The FSAI is responsible for monitoring food on the Irish market and enforces food legislation for the protection of public health. This monitoring is carried out by routine surveillance, surveys and through the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) Strategy. The surveillance and surveys are carried out by the FSAI and in conjunction with official agencies such as the HSE, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority, City and County Councils and their associated laboratories.

There is a legal requirement among Irish businesses to have a HACCP system in place. This is enforced and monitored by the FSAI. HACCP is a system that allows the identification and control of any hazards that could pose a danger to the preparation of safe food. It involves identifying what can go wrong, planning to prevent it and making sure these measures are implemented. HACCP has seven principles on the hygiene of foodstuffs. Each business' food safety management system must be based on these 7 principles. Further to the legal requirement to have a HACCP system in place, there is a legal requirement for the staff responsible for the development and maintenance of HACCP to have received adequate training for the application of the HACCP principles.

The FSAI's primary focus is to assist food business to achieve good hygiene standards and comply with the law. In order to aid businesses implement HACCP they have produced a pack, 'Safe Catering – your guide to making food safely'<sup>49</sup>. This is a tool to help caterers develop a system to manage food safety and comply with food hygiene regulations; it presents options for businesses to choose how they plan to implement their food safety system. This tool can also be used by retailers who have a catering function within their business. In addition to this tool the FSAI provides guidelines on how to install pre-requisite hygiene requirements, how to get started and on how to choose a system based on the principles of HACCP that suits their business. The FSAI also provides Food Safety Training resources, from basic to advanced level, to aid management personnel of food businesses



to carry out their legal requirement to train their staff and develop and maintain the required HACCP principles.

## **Sustainable Food**

When considering the issue of healthy food procurement in the public sector it is important to include reference to improving food sustainability. Over recent years there has been a growing global realisation that current food production models are unsustainable<sup>50</sup>. The loss of biodiversity and the negative effects of food consumption patterns are having negative impacts on the environment, local economies and the health of nations.

Current evidence states that food production and consumption have a high impact on the environment<sup>50</sup>. The food chain is responsible for almost one fifth of greenhouse gas emissions which primarily comes from food manufacture, transportation of fertilisers and pesticides, and the use of fuel on farms<sup>51</sup>. Organic farming reduces the amount of carbon dioxide emissions and utilises significantly less energy than conventional farming (50% less energy input per land unit area) and is therefore a more efficient and sustainable form of food production than conventional farming methods<sup>51</sup>.

Sustainable food procurement encompasses best 'value for money' in its broadest sense. Serving nutritious food in public hospitals aids patient recovery and makes beds available within a shorter timeframe and within prisons may also help to ease anti-social behaviour. Serving local organic food increases opportunities for local suppliers which in turn helps to maintain local employment and fosters thriving communities. Specifying organic food and other methods of production which protects the environment and safeguards animal welfare help ensure a flourishing countryside. Although there are many benefits for long term 'value for money', public sector contracts are often given to the least expensive bid thereby looking at the initial cost savings rather than foreseeing long-term sustainable and economical benefits.

There is a need for more efficient and sustainable food production, processing and distribution in order to reduce future threat of food security. Within the UK, the PSFPI<sup>18</sup> highlights actions taken by procurement officers in order to address sustainability issues. Purchasers have amended their tenders to include requests to suppliers to prove that their food products are manufactured in a manner which is resource efficient, sustainable and ensures animal welfare. Additionally, purchasers have carried out reviews of their logistical and distribution processes to incorporate measures which are more efficient and sustainable thereby reducing the environmental impact of their food transportation.

Another initiative that procurement officers in the UK have carried out to improve long term food sustainability is to open up trade with small and local businesses. It has shown that this may insure long term 'value for money' as trading locally creates the local multiplier effect (every £10 spent locally generates £25 for the local economy) which helps maintain the vitality of communities<sup>18</sup>.

Although all public procurement must comply with the EC Treaty and EU directives, there is scope to incorporate objectives to increase tenders for small and local suppliers. The EU legislation is designed to ensure that public procurement is fair, transparent and not used to discriminate by setting up barriers to free trade. Procurement officers can still achieve their objectives by considering exactly what they want from a contract at the start of the procurement process; by stating product specifications such as 'fresh', 'seasonal', 'organic', 'farm assured' or 'packaging' (whereby only small producers have the flexibility to meet these requirements) on their tender contracts. Further specifications to their contracts have included, 'delivery times' and the division of tenders into 'lots' to attract small and local producers. Best practice shows that increasing tenders with small and local businesses requires purchasers to work closely with suppliers; to help them attain accreditation (HACCP, farm assurance) where necessary, enable their understanding of the public procurement process, lengthening timescales to bid for contracts and insuring advertisements for contracts are viewed by them<sup>18</sup>.

The Irish government has addressed food sustainability as it relates to its production. The Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Food has introduced an 'Organic Farming Action Plan' (2008-2012)<sup>52</sup>. This plan aims to develop the organic sector in Ireland by introducing a number of measures, for example, by increasing the land area under organic production and developing financial incentives for farmers to go organic. In addition to this, the Office of Public Works (OPW) has published a sustainability policy<sup>53</sup> which describes details for opportunities and methods for implementing sustainability practice in the areas of the environment (energy consumption and Green House Gases, reduction of waste, re-cycling) and improving health and well-being.

The key principle for Irish public sector procurement is 'best value for public money'. It is to be cost effective and efficient in the use of their resources while maintaining high standards of procurement practice. The process is subject to audit and scrutiny and accounting officers are publicly accountable for expenditure incurred. It is conceivable that this accountability for expenditure and 'value for money' may prevent the foresight of long term cost effectiveness as it relates to sustainability goals as they relate to health, the environment and economic advantages for local communities.

To date the Irish government has recognised the importance of the incorporation of small and local businesses to public sector procurement. In 1999 a report entitled 'Small Firms and Public Procurement in Ireland' was published<sup>54</sup>. This makes recommendations on making the public sector market more accessible to small local firms, for example by standardising tender forms, through better advertising and improved training of public purchasers. These recommendations are incorporated within the current National Procurement Policy Framework<sup>34</sup> and further study is being carried out to further encourage and facilitate procurement with small and local businesses. A recent report by the Procurement Innovation Group, 'Using Public Procurement to Stimulate Innovation and SME Access to Public Contracts', was published this year and offers further recommendations to procurement officers within the public sector to aid tendering to small and medium sized local suppliers<sup>33</sup>.

## **Public Sector healthy food procurement in Ireland- the way forward?**

Since public sector organisations are major employers, purchasers and service providers it is appropriate that they should protect and promote good health and well-being in all their activities. Public sector catering and its governance is a complex issue and involves a diverse range of organisations involved in its delivery. The development and implementation of a public sector food procurement policy in Ireland would require an inter-departmental and organisation approach with clear objectives and deliverables overseen by a separate implementation group. However, the implementation of a Public sector food procurement combined with policies, guidelines and training could make a real contribution to improving the health of the population and to sustainable development. It is also important that all public sector organisations provide safe and healthy food but also consider other objectives such as food availability and sustainability.

## **Recommendations**

### **Establishment of a Public Sector Healthy Food Procurement Policy**

- There are many policies and initiatives in place within Ireland which promote healthy eating in the public sector. However, a more 'joined up' approach is required to implement a public sector food procurement policy on a national basis. A regulatory framework for the Initiative would need to be developed to ensure that it has a high level of support and a strong steer from government.
- The implementation of a Public Sector Healthy Food Procurement policy should be overseen by a steering group with representatives from the various government and non-government departments and organisations. Funding would be required to implement this. Considerations into how a Public Sector Food Procurement Policy would be encouraged and/or enforced throughout the food industry would need to be thoroughly explored and identified among members of the steering group.

- The development of a Public Sector Healthy Food Procurement policy should include all relevant government departments (e.g. Departments of Agriculture, Health and Children and Finance) and organisations (e.g. FSAI, Safefood).

### **Implementation of a Public Sector Healthy Procurement Policy**

- An Implementation Group may be required in order to ensure actions developed by the Public Sector Food Procurement Steering Group are carried out.
- Regional Public Sector Food Procurement Policy co-ordinators would be required to implement the initiatives within different organisations within their regions. Their roles and responsibilities would need to be defined by an Implementation Group.
- Further research is required to clarify constraints that may exist in the implementation of a Public Sector Food Procurement Initiative. There may be constraints from public sector procurement officer's standpoint which would require thorough investigation prior to the implementation of a national public sector food procurement policy, for example a lack of a standardised public sector food procurement contract.

### **Training and development to implement a Public Sector Healthy Procurement Policy**

- Provide resources for training/education (for both procurement officers and suppliers). For example, for procurement officers: 'how to tender for their food requirements which incorporates the primary objectives of the policy' and for suppliers – 'understanding of public sector food procurement'. This training would need to be provided for small groups throughout the country.
- Further development by the Department of Health and Children of nutrition guidelines is required, for adults, post-primary school children and the elderly within public sector institutions.
- Consider the development of Awards for 'Healthy Food Provision' and the incorporation of 'Sustainability' into the food procurement process. A healthy food

provision award for caterers who serve food within the public sector - similar to the U.K.'s – 'Healthy Food Mark' Award could be developed. Additionally Awards for the incorporation of sustainability initiatives could be developed as they relate to more sustainable food procurement (environment, animal welfare, waste management).

- Increase awareness of current schemes (e.g. catering awards) and incorporate them into a policy.
- Provide a one stop website for anyone involved in procurement; best practice guidelines and case studies. This website should include topics such as the benefits of a more 'aggregated approach to food procurement', 'the importance of developing a good working relationship with suppliers', 'how to procure food more sustainably' and give examples of how tender contracts can be altered to meet the objectives of the Policy.
- Consideration of the development of a Nutritional Database for the HSE similar to the NHS. The NHS has a nutritional database which contains information for all of their food products that their central Purchasing and Supply Agency (PASA) procurers. This is available to all NHS staff and suppliers and has been developed to help hospitals to source more nutritious products from their suppliers. This in turn insures that suppliers provide products which contain lower amounts of salt, fat and sugar. This may work alongside the current HSE's 'Salt Reduction Program' and be further developed to procure products which contain lower amounts of fat and sugar.

### **Evaluation of Public Sector Healthy Procurement Policy**

- Build in objectives so that these can be evaluated. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the evaluation of initiatives taken from a public sector food procurement policy would need to be developed. Targets/standards to measure performance such as the reduction of Green House Gas (GHG) emissions from their logistical food

distribution process. These targets may be adopted from those identified in the U.K. PSFPI.

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