

LENS, FRANCE

Background

The City of Lens is an old mining city situated in the North Pas-de-Calais region in the North East of France. Lens has a population of 36,000 people and is one of the more economically disadvantaged cities in France. The City of Lens wished to demonstrate that GPP can lead to cost savings and should not be restricted to wealthier cities only. The food and catering sector was one of its primary GPP targets and the City prioritised the 203,000 meals per year served in its ten schools.

France has set a national target of 20% organic food in school meals by 2017. Currently, 53% of school canteens in France offer organic food, however, this represents on average just 2% of the food served.

Procurement objectives

It was recognised that there was an issue with the quality of meals served in school canteens in the City of Lens and therefore, in 2008 it employed a nutritionist to assess school food quality. Subsequently, a committee of parents and service provider employees was introduced to regularly review the food served. At this time, the committee determined organic food to be too expensive.

However, by 2012 the committee recognised that by procuring a specified amount of organic food, the price of the meals would not be significantly affected. Therefore, in 2012 the committee advised the City to include the requirement for 20% organic food in its tender for catering services in school canteens.

Criteria used

Subject matter of the contract: Procurement of Supplies and Services for the Preparation and Delivery of Cold Food

Technical specifications: It was specified that 20% of the food provided to each school must be organic. More specifically, one completely organic meal had to be provided each week. The procurers involved did not mandate a higher proportion of organic food than this, as they felt that it may have too much of an impact on price. However, variants were allowed giving the bidder the opportunity to offer a higher percentage of organic food.

The contents of the organic meals were required to include only components derived from organic farming and which are certified according to the existing [EEC Regulation 2092/91](#). The winning bidder was also obliged to comply with any successive amendments. This Regulation has now been repealed and replaced by [EC Regulation \(EC\) No. 834/2007](#) and amended by [\(EC\) No.267/2008](#) and [\(EU\) No 517/2013](#). The service provider was required to ensure traceability and, upon request and without delay, provide the City with evidence of the organic origin of relevant produce. As part of their bids, service providers were required to provide three examples of organic menus. Additionally, the winning bidder was required to train its staff as regards the composition, nutritional value and balance of every meal.

Award criteria: The Quality:Price weighting of points allocated during the award phase was 70:30. Of the 70 points allocated to quality, 50% (35 points) were allocated to the quality of the food itself.

Bidders were assessed on:

- The variation of menus and variety of dishes depending on the age of the diners and their expectations
- The nutritional balance of menus
- The quality of any existing action plan dealing with issues of food security and crisis management
- The production method of all food items included in meals
- The quality of any existing policy on the traceability of all food products and verification of accuracy

Contract performance clauses:

The contract included a list of penalties which would apply, should the contractor not comply with a specified aspect of the contract. This included a list of negligences for which the winning bidder would be fined, should they be found not to be compliant. The list included:

- Not complying with the agreed menus without prior consent in writing from the City of Lens
- Not communicating information on each menu such as products used and the method of production
- Not providing documentation which demonstrates product traceability upon demand
- Not complying with the terms of packaging and the proper ingredients labelling of meal trays
- Not training staff on aspects of food composition, nutritional value and meal balance



Results

All three companies that submitted bids were able to meet the specified standards, however, none of them proposed variant offers with higher proportions of organic food. Organic menus proposed by the winning bidder were priced at €1.51 per meal; a reasonably small cost premium compared to the non-organic menu priced at €1.40. The difference of 8% is paid for by the City.

The City of Lens advertised the fact that one organic menu would be served a week and received positive feedback from the parents. In 2013, the consumer association "UFC Que Choisir" gave the mark of 14.5 out of 20 for the quality of the meals in the canteens of Lens.

Environmental impacts

Creating demand for organic food assists in the transition away from the use of pesticides and fertilisers, which can cause eutrophication of water bodies, soil and water acidification, and toxic impacts on human-, animal- and environmental health due to the bioaccumulation and biomagnification of these chemicals in water, air, soil and food.

Additionally, organic farming tends to conserve soil fertility and system stability better than conventional farming systems. This is due to mostly higher organic matter contents and higher biological activity in organically farmed soils than in those which are conventionally managed.

Not only has this tender had positive environmental impacts in terms of creating demand for organic produce, it has helped raise the profile of organic food by making stakeholders aware of the improvement in the school catering service, particularly important in the context of educational institutions.

Lessons learned

The City of Lens intends to introduce more detailed GPP criteria for their next catering tender, including those relating to the provision of the service such as the delivery and manufacturing of the food, as well the food itself.

None of the three bidders proposed variant bids with a provision of a higher percentage of organic food. Therefore, in future the City of Lens will emphasise in the tender documentation that it is both possible and advantageous to provide such variant offers in future. The City will also take this into consideration when using variants to explore price premiums for green products in tenders for other products and service categories.

One of the most positive lessons learned was that the success of this green procurement activity has encouraged local politicians of the value of GPP and of introducing a sustainability policy for the City of Lens.