Procuring university jumpers made from responsible, organic cotton

Masaryk University (Czech Republic)

Background

Masaryk University is located in Brno in the Czech Republic. It is the second largest university in the Czech Republic, with around 35,000 students and 5,000 employees.

In 2017, Masaryk University set out to purchase jumpers, which would be branded with the university’s name, and primarily sold to students and staff members in the University store.

The jumpers aim to promote the University and increase its visibility. The University therefore wanted to ensure that the quality and manufacturing process of the items matched its institutional values.

Procurement objectives

In order to purchase responsible jumpers, Masaryk University used a framework agreement model. When designing the call for tender, the University drew on resources prepared as part of the Socially Responsible Public Procurement service run by the Czech Republic’s Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, as well as the EU’s GPP criteria for textiles.

Masaryk University was also keen to support the participation of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in the tender, and to do so, they streamlined the tender documentation and provided a sample form demonstrating how tenders should be completed.

Criteria used

Subject matter of the contract:
Supply of organic cotton jumpers, which will serve to promote Masaryk University and support responsible consumption.

Technical specifications:
Masaryk University specified that jumpers had to contain a minimum of 80% organic cotton, and that the production of the cotton had to meet the following conditions:

- Contain no genetically modified cotton
- Conform to environmentally-friendly production standards
- Controlled use of pesticides and other agrochemicals for the cotton content which does not meet organic standards
- Comply with the International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions listed in Annex X to Directive 2014/24/EU
In order to verify that the cotton used met the required production standards, bidders were asked to provide proof according to one of the following:

- the Fairtrade certification scheme, or
- a label evidencing organic production (such as the Global Organic Textile Standard), or
- another certification scheme with comparable requirements.

**Award criteria:**

Bids were assessed according to the following criteria and weightings:

- Price (45% of total points).
- Quality (40% of total points). In order to assess quality, bidders were asked to provide a sample of the goods.

These were then scored according to their utility and material properties (including colour fastness, flexibility and elasticity, pleasantness to touch, shape stability, softness, and overall aesthetic look) and the quality of manufacturing (including the cut and symmetry, the overall quality of sewing and garment production, the fabric construction and the surface finish). These samples were scored using a scale of 0 to 100, with 100 points available for samples which maximally complied with or corresponded to the purpose of the framework agreement. Those who could not be assessed were awarded zero points.

Manufacturing process (15% of total points). The manufacturing process was also assessed to determine the extent to which the offered products fulfilled the requirements of ethical purchasing, with up to 100 points available to bidders who proved that all of the following criteria were met in the production process:

- a transparent supply chain;
- payment of a fair wage;
- safe working conditions (adhering to relevant standards);
- prohibition of forced and child labour;
- compliance with working time (overtime does not exceed legally permitted limits); and,
- valid employment contracts.

To prove these criteria were met, the bidder could submit evidence proving either:

- membership of the Fair Wear Foundation;
- products imported and distributed by a membership organisation of the World Fair Trade Organisation; or,
- other certificates or endorsements from credible sources.

Note: The contract value was below the threshold for application of the EU procurement directives.

**Results**

Masaryk University’s initial call requested jumpers produced with a minimum of 95% organic cotton, however, neither of the two bids that they received met this requirement, and the tender procedure had to be cancelled.

In order to understand why this requirement for organic cotton could not be met, the contracting authority contacted the bidders, and found that while this percentage of organic cotton is achievable, suppliers did not have enough time to conclude contracts with foreign manufacturers and prepare their bids before the deadline.

Due to its own time constraints, the University therefore decided to modify its requirements and publish a new Call for Tenders, which requested (minimum) 80% organic cotton; all other requirements remaining unchanged. Two bids were submitted - this time both meeting the requirements. As both offers were almost identical in terms of quality and manufacturing process, the final decision was determined by price, with the winning tender offering jumpers at CZK **The successful tender demonstrates that it is possible to purchase jumpers made from organic cotton fibres for a comparable price to regular jumpers - which do not meet socially responsible production requirements.**
389 (excluding VAT) - approximately 15 euro per jumper - which is comparable in price to regular jumpers that do not comply with socially responsible production requirements.

The value of the contract was 287,600CZK - equivalent to 11,000 euro.

**Environmental impacts**

The cultivation of cotton as a global commodity crop results in significant environmental impacts, most of which are the result of pesticides and fertilisers used in intensive farming systems. Cotton uses 15% of the world's total pesticides, which accounts for more than any other single major crop. Carbon emissions are produced through the production of pesticides and fertilisers, which threaten human and ecosystem health, and cause water pollution through the release of harmful chemicals into the environment ([European Commission, 2017](#)).

Organic cotton, as defined by the EU organic production Regulation 834/2007, avoids the use of industrial fertilisers and pesticides, and is therefore environmentally preferable to any other form of cotton cultivation. Presently, organic cotton is estimated to account for only 1.3% of the European market ([European Commission, 2017](#)), but by demanding it through their public purchases, public authorities can help provide a greater certainty of demand, making it increasingly easy for suppliers to meet higher organic requirements.

**Lessons learned**

Conducting market research can ensure the best results and help to save time. In this case, while it was possible for companies to meet the initially requested 95% organic cotton requirement, they were not able to source suppliers, sign the necessary contracts, and prepare bids in time for meeting the set deadline. Speaking with suppliers helped the contracting authority understand what was possible; however, this understanding was only reached after the first procedure had to be cancelled.

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For related information, please see [European GPP criteria for Textiles](#) and the [Technical Background Report](#).