

'Cuisinons notre région': from farm to fork in mass catering services

'Cuisinons notre région' (literally 'Let's cook our region') is an initiative launched in 2015 in Switzerland by the Canton of Valais. Led by the Cantonal Agricultural Service and its School of Agriculture, the initiative aims at promoting the use of local products in collective catering.

Mass catering, a challenge of sustainability

More than 6 million meals are taken in schools, institutions and companies' canteens every year in the Canton of Valais (according to the latest study by the Federal Statistical Office in 2009). Although collective catering has declined in many countries since the COVID-19 outbreak - but not in Switzerland, where schools and companies' canteens have remained open - its popularity has continued to grow since the 2000s.

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Mass catering therefore has a central place in the daily diet of workers and pupils and thus provides a place for education on sustainability and the promotion of local products and concepts of origin, traceability, and quality. However, although Switzerland is self-sufficient in food at 56%, it remains one of the countries with the lowest self-supply rate in the world.

Implementation of 'Cuisinons notre région'

From the pilot project to its extension throughout the Canton

'Cuisinons notre région' began in 2015 with a market study and a state of play of the catering industry. A pilot project was set up with 4 canteens in order to test indicators and define specifications. The aim was then to increase the number of partner establishments and to improve the offer of products, for example by replacing orange juice with fresh local fruit juices (apples, pears, grapes), to ensure the origin of frozen products or industrial jams, to switch to home-made desserts and to favour ingredients from organic farming.

The success of the initiative led the State Council to make compulsory the participation to 'Cuisinons notre région' for all collective catering establishments belonging to the Canton of Valais or benefiting from public subsidies from the Canton covering at least 50% of their budget (see [decision of 24 June 2020](#)). The concerned canteens have 12 months to comply and will have to present a detailed and transparent analysis of the products used in their kitchens in June 2021.

Support to chefs and producers

Year after year, the initiators of the 'Cuisinons notre région' initiative have developed actions and tools with the aim of supporting canteens and collective restauration establishment participating in the approach and of convincing new catering establishments. More than 387 letters have been sent to restaurant managers and chefs in the canton and 131 to targeted producers and suppliers in order to spread the initiative.

The Valais School of Agriculture has also drawn up various standard documents to facilitate the steps taken by organisations in joining the 'Cuisinons notre région' initiative.



- Sustainability specifications: For whom? For institutions wishing to become a partner. What for? To facilitate their commitment to promote regional products, to use the Beelong Indicator from time to time, and to implement socially and environmentally responsible practices in their kitchens.
- Specifications on traceability: For whom? For producers and suppliers. What for? To become a partner in the approach and commit to including regional products in their offer and to ensuring the traceability of all the foodstuffs on offer.
- A typical call for tenders: For whom? For buyers. What for? To provide them with a list of important criteria, to be communicated to suppliers so that they can propose offers that meet these sustainability requirements.

In addition, an annual meeting is organised with partner producers and suppliers, chefs from participating establishments and the associated local authorities (cantons and municipalities).

Communication campaigns have also been carried out and a graphic charter is available for partner organisations in order to promote the approach. A [practice guide](#) is also available to help understand how to use regional foods when opening a new mass catering place, depending on the target audience.

Resources and governance

The initiative is led by the Canton of Valais (agricultural service), under the coordination of Ludovic Delaloye, himself a certified federal chef. Via the Canton, the School of Agriculture and its students are also involved in the initiative. The project was also supported by the [Foundation for the Sustainable Development of Mountain Regions](#), which worked on the communication and awareness-raising actions, graphic charter and practice guide.



Following the State Council's decision to make participation to "Cuisinons notre région" compulsory for public establishments, a budget of 1.6 million Swiss francs has been allocated for the period 2021-2023 - entirely financed by the Sustainable Development Programme of the Canton of Valais.

Putting sustainability on the plates of the catering industry

Since 2015, the Swiss initiative 'Cuisinons notre région' has been attempting to enable the catering industry to give priority to local, high-quality products and thus to reconcile the environmental, social and economic dimensions of sustainability.

Socio-economic impacts

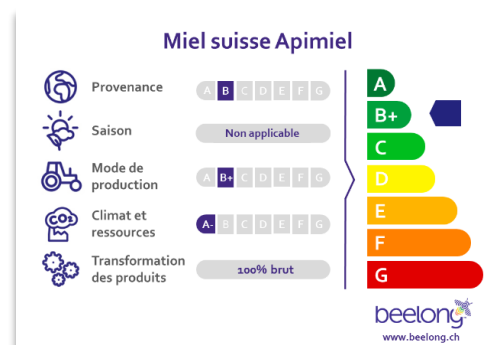
'Cuisinons notre région' facilitates the purchase of regional and quality food products at a fair price for producers. To achieve this, the platform [RegioFoodVS](#) was created. Producers and suppliers commit themselves to promote their products on this website and to explain the social and/or environmental added value of the products. The canteens and mass catering establishments that are partners in the approach commit to purchase a large part of their products on this platform. Commercial exchanges are thus carried out within this new framework but always in compliance with the usual rules in terms of delivery and quality. Free training courses to learn how to use the platform are offered to encourage its use. Direct contact with the producer remains possible: if the foodstuffs meeting these criteria are available through direct sale or another supply channel, it is not prohibited.

Environmental approach

28% of the environmental impact of consumption in Switzerland is due to food, according to the Federal Office for the Environment. The initiative therefore helps to increase the environmental sustainability of meals. It promotes the use of mountain products from extensive agriculture and pastoralism. Moreover, by favouring local products, 'Cuisinons notre région' promotes short circuits and reduces not only the number of intermediaries but also the number of kilometres travelled by the products.

The approach of proximity is also in line with the Agenda 21 of the Canton of Valais - an action plan for sustainability. This programme aims in particular to promote, in order of priority, Valaisan, Swiss and, finally, European or even global production for specific products such as coffee. The purchase of products with a label, such as PDO, PGI, TSG, organic farming, Label Rouge, etc., is also encouraged.

In order to facilitate the understanding of sustainability among restaurateurs, 'Cuisinons notre région' also promotes the Beelong indicator. Developed by the Lausanne Hotel School, Beelong aims to be an 'ecological food indicator'. This scheme assesses 5 sustainability indicators: origin, season, production method, climate and resources, and product transport. For each indicator, a score between A and G is attributed to the product, and the average obtained thus enables everyone to understand the different dimensions of a product's environmental performance.



The Beelong indicator can be used to evaluate a food product, all the ingredients in a dish or the totality of a restaurant's purchases. Around forty collective restaurants in French-speaking Switzerland currently use this indicator. Although the 'Cuisinons notre région' initiative promotes the use of the Beelong indicator in the purchase of products, it is not an obligation.

Innovative aspect

'Cuisinons notre région' is a comprehensive approach to the transition to more sustainable food systems. Targeting mass catering is an innovative approach, which raises questions about everyday food and public procurement rules, in line with the political will to promote short circuits and regional producers.

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