



# Whitaker Institute Policy Brief Series



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**Cluster:** Environment, Development and Sustainability

**Theme:** Sustainable and inclusive societies

**Further Reading:** Goggins, G. (2018) Developing a sustainable food strategy for large organizations: The importance of context in shaping procurement and consumption practices. *Bus Strat Env.* 2018;1-11

Goggins, G. & Rau, H. (2016) Beyond calroie counting: Assessing the sustainability of food provided for public consumption. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 112(1): 257-266

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**Read More About:** [Environment, Development and Sustainability](#) within the Whitaker Institute for Innovation and Societal Change

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## Developing sustainable healthy food policies in universities, hospitals and the workplace

Every day, at every meal, people across Ireland are reliant on a global network of actors to produce, process and distribute the food that they consume. But the dominant system of industrialized food provisioning is unsustainable both from a socio-economic and an environmental perspective. The additional demands that will be made on the food system over the next 30 years and beyond will place additional pressures on an already fragile system. A necessary transformation of the food system requires action from all levels of society, including organizations and institutions that provide food. Organizations such as hospitals, workplaces and educational institutions shape the meal choices of thousands of people every day and have a significant impact on the food system through their procurement and provisioning activities. These activities have a direct impact on people's health, the economy, social wellbeing and the environment.

### Research Findings

This research highlights the importance of contextual considerations in determining how and why organizations provide food. Organizations were found to differ significantly in terms of their primary function, the sector in which they operate, their food procurement practices and contractual arrangements, their organizational food culture and material conditions. Each of these factors was found to have a significant impact on food service delivery. Despite the heterogeneity across organizations' food-related activities, the findings reveal opportunities and constraints for increasing food sustainability that are likely to apply within and across different organizational contexts. These factors are discussed in terms of their implications for developing a long-term sustainable food strategy.

### Policy implications

The findings challenge prevailing economic oriented models of food provisioning that generally favour low cost over more sustainable values such as social solidarity, ecological integrity and public health. Yet communicating the potential benefits of sustainable food provisioning to organizational managers, catering officials, policy makers, consumers and the general public remains one of the core challenges facing sustainable food advocates. The inherent complexity in quantifying social and environmental impacts of food provisioning, including inevitable trade-offs, makes a convincing argument all the more difficult to articulate. This research demonstrates the extent to which financial concerns dominate other considerations in relation to organizational food provisioning. However, it also presents a more nuanced and integrated approach to improving food sustainability and demonstrates how implementing a sustainable and healthy food strategy requires cooperation between organizations, caterers, consumers and policy makers.