

# **From skipped free school lunches to poverty-induced food deserts: Some thoughts on Gothenburg’s local food strategy – and how to make it happen**

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## **Abstract**

The city of Gothenburg is devoted to establishing a local food strategy (GAFS) able to transform the local food system into one of healthy and sustainable food supply to all Gothenburgers, while at the same time decreasing the environmental impact globally. Departing from the Gothenburg municipality’s environmental and climate programs, the GAFS also relates back to the Swedish environmental goals and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As such, GAFS is a municipal mission with global ambitions, but it is also an active testbed within the project Urban Rural Gothenburg with the goal to lay bare GAFS’s preconditions to obtain the desired effect. While the idea is an attractive one and in line with current calls for food sustainability, the practical work process has been marred by loose and indirect interaction between the actors as well as insufficient knowledge of the stakeholders’ preconditions and priorities to secure stronger impact. An important factor in this dimension has been the overwhelming scope of what the food strategy must cover in order to be successful. This presentation focuses on two of them: skipped free school lunches and poverty-induced food deserts. On the one hand, the city of Gothenburg offers free school lunches to all its school children, which nonetheless are surreptitiously skipped due to children’s poor understanding of the nutritious, ecological and just value of such lunches. On the other hand, certain areas of Gothenburg, like Hammarkullen with 8,000 inhabitants, have not had a supermarket since the 1990s due to major food chains’ disinterest in establishing themselves in poor immigrant neighborhoods (due to demand for very cheap foods or certain types of foods, e.g. halal or kosher). Instead the citizens are forced to travel up to 1 hour to procure affordable food (car ownership is extremely low) or to buy small portions of grossly overpriced products from local street vendors. These two examples show how both the use and underuse of political power is problematic in different circumstances, with similarly adverse effects for a sustainable local food strategy. In this presentation, we focus on this worrying divergence by discussing the hidden traps within, but also by bringing forth known success stories as possible ways forward.

## **Keywords**

local food strategy, food system, school lunches, food desert, Learning Sustainable Meals