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Increasing the sustainability of school meals: the role of portion sizes

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Abstract

School meals have the potential to educate the next generation not only about healthy eating, but also about one of the most urgent environmental challenges, food waste, in terms of reduction, reuse and recycling. However, school catering services are characterized by a significant level of inefficiency regarding the food processed but not consumed during the meals. On the assumption that food waste can occur at any points in the food chain, this work evaluates the meal supply in primary schools in Italy in order to analyse possible points of inefficiency upstream of the food chain, originating in the provisions contained in the contract between municipalities and catering services. The analysis was performed on the portion sizes specified in the public tenders in all of the 20 regions of Italy. Preliminary results revealed great discrepancies amongst regions and in several cases, portion sizes were significantly larger than recommended in the national guidelines for school catering. These results have clear economic, social, health and environmental implications in terms of revisiting Italian policies and new solutions for more sustainable healthy school canteens.

Keywords : food waste, sustainable public procurement, school meals, sustainable diets, portion size