

# LIÈGE BELGIUM

## LEVERAGING AN INCLUSIVE FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSITION

*This food policy snapshot is based on an interview with GILLES FORÊT, Alderman in charge of Ecological Transition at the City of Liège.*

### GLASGOW FOOD AND CLIMATE DECLARATION

Liège, a city in the northeast of the Wallonia region of Belgium, is advancing ambitious food systems change with the active participation of its residents. For over a decade, the City of Liège has been committed to an ecological transition to create an affordable, accessible, and sustainable local food system. At the forefront of this progress is the recently launched House of Sustainable and Inclusive Food, or ‘MADIL,’ a municipal initiative created in close collaboration with the Liège Food and Earth Network (CATL). MADil concretizes the community’s vision for food systems change into a physical space for creation and experimentation. It also serves as a coordinating mechanism to bring residents and decision-makers together on a regular basis to ensure food systems remain a priority on the political agenda.

## ENABLERS

### A DEDICATED OPERATIONAL HUB PROMOTING PARTICIPATION AND HORIZONTAL POLICY INTEGRATION

The City of Liège is committed to participatory food policymaking that engages all local stakeholders and residents. The momentum for a food systems transition in Liège has existed for over a decade, particularly through the work of the CATL, created in November 2013 to promote the development of a sustainable local food system. Consistent engagement between CATL and the municipal government culminated in the creation of MADil, formalizing the City’s commitment to and prioritization of an ecological transition. MADil now benefits from a dedicated full-time team and an institutional framework for coordination between the City and local residents. An interdisciplinary working group made up of representatives from different city departments has also been set up to coordinate regularly around food systems projects, ensuring cross-cutting food systems strategies that reflect different priorities, expertise, and perspectives.

### BEYOND THE CITY’S EDGE

Liège derives part of its success through cooperation with actors outside city boundaries. Membership in international networks, including the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP) and URBACT, allow Liège to learn from and contribute to the expertise of other cities spearheading integrated food policy approaches. For example, Liège’s BioCanteen initiative is part of a broader URBACT program which draws on Mouans-Sartoux’s pioneering work on local procurement and sustainable school meals. Complementing this cross-city collaborative approach is Liège’s engagement with the surrounding region through a recent Food Policy Council which includes the city’s surrounding rural communities. Collaboration within this Council aims to bridge the differing realities experienced across regional geographies and strengthen rural-urban linkages.

## LIÈGE’S FOOD POLICIES

- With its CREaFARM initiative, Liège makes urban plots available to small-scale producers, supporting local and sustainable food production.
- The BIOCANTEEN initiative aims to improve Liège’s 3,500 school meals to be sustainable, local, and organic while reducing food waste.
- In partnership with “Le Centre liégeois du Beau Mur”, a local non-profit organization, the City of Liège has developed more than 40 raised vegetable beds around the city through its “Cultivating Liège, Edible City” project, based on the INCREDIBLE EDIBLE concept. This initiative acts as a mechanism for social cohesion. Citizens can apply for a greening permit in order to install and maintain a raised bed in a public space near them.
- The NOURRIR LIÈGE (Feeding Liège) festival is a highlight of the City’s annual events calendar. In 2021, more than 130 organizations participated in activities, events, and discussions open to the general public on food issues.

## BARRIERS

### ADMINISTRATIVE CONSTRAINTS

Administrative constraints, often stemming from higher levels of government, are a significant obstacle in driving positive change at the local level. For example, public procurement regulations are developed at the national and EU levels with conflicting parameters. Due to competitive tendering rules, current public procurement regulations ignore sustainable sourcing, nutrition, or local procurement considerations. These can be difficult barriers to overcome, especially when combined with inadequate regional, national, and EU-level support for local food producers engaging in sustainable production practices.

### BRINGING EVERYONE TO THE TABLE

Fostering genuine multi-stakeholder collaboration can sometimes be a challenging process. While many local actors are enthusiastic about changing food systems, some remain skeptical. Though often limited, time is required for meaningful dialogue on the aims, progress, and complexities of a sustainable food systems transition. Showcasing positive examples can help to motivate partners and stakeholders. For instance, exchanging good practices at a Milan Urban Food Policy Pact meeting in Montpellier encouraged peers to apply the lessons learned back home. Due to more immediate priorities, others remain less engaged in local food policy processes. For example, many residents continue to experience food insecurity and must first consider the affordability and accessibility of foods. To better account for these realities, the City of Liège aims to engage more actively with residents facing issues to access healthy and nutritious foods in the coming years.

Community collaboration and coordination are the driving forces behind Liège’s progress to create a healthy, sustainable, and affordable food system for all. Residents, local businesses, organizations, and decision-makers contribute to its success and shape its direction. As the new hub and testing site for food policymaking, MADil provides a framework for cooperation, leveraging the energy and ideas of the whole community for consensus-based progress on the ecological transition of the food system. policies, like Pittsburgh’s urban agriculture policies.

“ It’s true that there’s a lot of energy, a lot of goodwill, a lot of results coming from our City, but you need to take the time to explain it. We have to make results tangible to our community and be able to have honest conversations amongst each other when things get complicated. ”

