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*Liberté
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SCHOOL MEALS COALITION

Sharing experiences
and good practices

School meals in France

Healthy, safe and sustainable meals for all !



SEPTEMBER 2021



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France is involved in the Global School Meals Coalition, which among other actions, aims to stimulate exchanges and sharing of experience and good practices between countries and other members of the coalition.

In France, the provision of school meals involves at the same time the State, local authorities and private actors.

School catering is at the crossroads of several major issues: public health, school achievement, social justice, environment and food education.

This sector has been subject to specific regulations that have been strengthened in recent years.

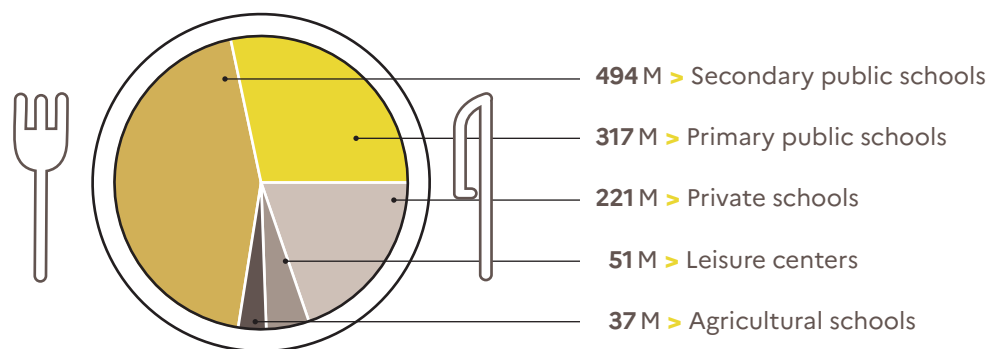
School catering in figures

In France, the day is structured around **three meals** and it is a commonplace to gather for lunch or for dinner in all circumstances.

The «canteen» is an integral part of this culture. In fact, more than **one in six main meals** is consumed outside home in France, almost half of which is in collective catering (schools, social establishments, hospitals, companies...)*.

The provision of school meals is compulsory for secondary education and, although not compulsory for primary education, this service is very frequently offered. Local authorities (municipalities, departments or regions) are responsible for collective catering in public schools (85% of the 61,500 schools in France). School catering represents more than **1.1 billion meals per year**, in 33,000 restaurants throughout the country.*

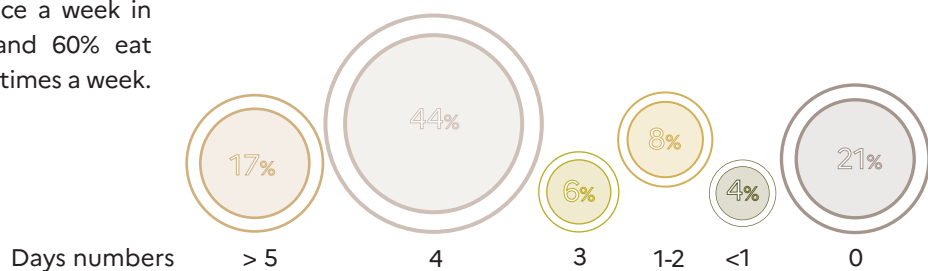
Number of meals per year (millions)



> Almost all French pupils go to the canteen at least part of their schooling

Approximately 75% of the 12.9 million schoolchildren eat at least once a week in the canteen, and 60% eat there at least 4 times a week.

Frequency of meals at the canteen each week



High quality nutritional meals

«Starter, main course, dairy product and/or dessert»

School meals reflect the French food culture.

Since 2011, the composition of meals in school catering is regulated, and since 2019, a weekly vegetarian menu has been tried out in school catering.

This weekly menu will become compulsory in 2021, and canteen managers are also required to train their staff in food quality and sustainability issues.



Out of 20 successive meals

it is mandatory to serve:



4/5 vegetarian menus



more than 10 fruits and vegetables as starters



10 vegetables as side dishes



more than 8 raw fruits for dessert



20 dairy products



more than 4 non-chopped red meats



more than 4 fish



less than 4 fatty or sweet desserts

French National Agency for Food Safety (Anses) assessed that consumption in school catering is more in line with dietary recommendations than in other types of out-of-home catering.*

School catering also contributes to the education of a balanced and healthy diet and fully participates in the prevention of obesity and diet-related chronic diseases.

This food culture, which is respected in all areas of life (school, work, socio-medical or prison environment), may explain the slower progression of overweight and obesity in France than in other countries.**

* INCA3 study, Anses, 2014-2015 – ** 2nd country in the EU with the lowest rate behind Italy, Eurostat, 2019

A high level of **health safety**

In 2020, more than **7 000 official controls** were carried out in mass catering establishments. A prior risk analysis targets in priority approved central kitchens (which produce large quantities of meals every day and of which about half are inspected every year), and then establishments serving sensitive individuals (young children, elderly or sick people).

The on-site findings led the inspectors to assess 91% of the establishments as having satisfactory or acceptable levels of risk control. Establishments assessed as inadequate have been noticed formally to correct the main non-conformities observed within a given timeframe. When the inspector considers that the establishment has lost control of the health risks, its health approval and its possible on-site service activity are suspended by the local State representative (the prefect).



Sustainable and quality food



School catering in France gives prominence to fresh, local products from sustainable, quality production practices. It is thus an integral part of the agricultural and food policy. The EGalim law (2018), supplemented by the Climate and Resilience law (2021), sets ambitious targets in this area, including the obligation to serve **50% sustainable and quality products**, including 20% from organic farming, from 1st January 2022.

Territorial food projects (PAT) aspire to unite the various actors in a territory around the issue of food, thus contributing to the consideration of the social, environmental, economic and health dimensions of a given territory. School canteens are often involved in this framework, by favouring supplies from the territory.

A lever for food education

The school restaurant is an essential place for food education. It allows pupils to discover products and production practices, to learn about balanced nutrition and the fight against food waste through the food served and educational activities.

The «**Taste classes**» scheme, deployed in schools throughout France since 2012 under the joint aegis of the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Agriculture, has been revitalised. The aim of this training tool is to encourage taste pleasure through sensory education, to promote pupils' curiosity about food and to prevent obesity and children's apprehension about some types of food.



Prices adapted to family income



Generally speaking, public catering fulfils a social role by providing meals at a price below its real production cost. The financial participation of families in public school meals is set by the competent authorities (municipality, department or region).

More than 75% of municipalities with more than 10,000 inhabitants apply a social pricing system, most often based on the family quotient, i.e. family income*. For smaller municipalities, the State has put in place financial support to encourage them to adopt social pricing.

* AMF survey, 2020

Thus, France is doing its utmost to ensure that all children have access to healthy, safe and sustainable school meals in order to make tomorrow's citizens aware of agricultural, health, environmental and cultural issues of food.

READ MORE <https://agriculture.gouv.fr/la-loi-agriculture-et-alimentation>

