Protein transition in Amsterdam

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Executive snapshot

Amsterdam is accelerating its transition to climate neutrality by tackling emissions embedded in food consumption. As a major contributor to scope 3 emissions, food - particularly animal-based protein - represents a critical opportunity for impact.

Through targeted policy action, the city aims to shift dietary patterns towards more sustainable, plant-based options while maintaining accessibility, health, and fairness. This work focuses on identifying effective, scalable policy levers that can drive behavioural change across key sectors such as retail, education, and public procurement.

By combining evidence-based analysis with stakeholder engagement, Amsterdam is advancing a coordinated, systems-level approach to food system transformation, while contributing insights that can inform other cities.

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Knowledge Report

THE IMPACT

This work supports Amsterdam in reducing emissions from food consumption by targeting one of the most impactful levers: the protein transition.

Animal-based proteins are a dominant source of food-related emissions, and shifting consumption patterns offers significant climate mitigation potential. The study identified and assessed 75 policy options, prioritising those with the highest potential to influence behaviour and reduce emissions.

Four key themes were identified as the most impactful for the context of Amsterdam:

- Retail interventions
- Food environments in education and sports settings
- Regional food system collaboration
- Positioning Amsterdam as a plant-based capital

Together, these interventions create the conditions for systemic change—targeting both supply and demand while enabling long-term transformation.

THE APPROACH

Amsterdam applied a structured and collaborative approach to identify effective policy pathways:

- Evidence gathering: Desk research and stakeholder interviews to map existing policies and best practices
- Longlisting: Development of a broad inventory of 75 potential policy measures across governance, education, procurement, regulation, and more
- Prioritisation: Semi-quantitative assessment based on climate impact, cost, and behavioural influence, specifically for the current ecosystem of Amsterdam
- Deep dives: Selection of four priority themes for detailed exploration
- Peer learning: Sharing insights through collaboration and exchange with other cities

This approach ensured that recommendations are not only evidence-based, but also tailored to the city’s context and governance capacity.

OUTCOMES AND LEARNING

The project delivered a set of actionable recommendations to accelerate the protein transition:

- Continue and expand sustainable public procurement, both within the municipal organisation and through partnerships
- Engage the retail sector, given its central role in shaping food consumption
- Leverage education and public institutions as areas where the city has direct influence and can act quickly
- Strengthen collaboration within the Metropolitan Region Amsterdam (MRA) to connect consumers with regional producers
- Use existing policy levers (e.g. tourism, logistics, events) to support Amsterdam's ambition to promote plant-based consumption, starting with voluntary approaches and progressing where needed

These recommendations provide a clear direction for implementation, building on existing activities while expanding into new areas.

What worked:

- Combining multiple policy types (information, incentives, regulation) increases effectiveness
- Aligning climate goals with health and affordability narratives improves public acceptance
- Focusing on areas within municipal control (e.g. procurement, education) enables faster progress
- Engaging stakeholders early supports feasibility and buy-in

Transferable insight:

Examples of high-potential policies from this project's longlist that may be relevant for other cities include:

- sustainable procurement policies, first within the city's own organisation, and then extended to other organisations through coalitions and agreements;
- designing tailored interventions that align with other policy goals, for example by including protein transition criteria in health or social food policy;
- applying pressure on government to regulate the protein split in retail, or negotiating agreements directly with retailers;
- regulating the food environment through bans or restrictions on food sales in specific locations or at events;
- using city-level food policy to pilot innovative measures, allowing cities to act as demonstration laboratories (including for national-level policy);
- appointing an alderman specifically responsible for the protein transition, alongside establishing a food council to ensure diverse perspectives are heard.
- Prioritisation methods (longlist → shortlist → deep dive) provide a replicable framework for other cities

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WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Learn more about Amsterdam

Explore deeper the protein transition in Amsterdam:

- Policy levers for a sustainable diet
- Supplementary longlist of 75 policy measures

Still got questions? Ask us:
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Wider learning:

- The impact potential of policy options varies significantly, making prioritisation essential
- Cities have different levels of influence, and some measures require action at national level
- Policy effectiveness depends on local context, meaning approaches need to be adapted rather than directly replicated
- Despite these differences, a range of effective policy options is available to cities and can be implemented in different contexts

NEXT STEPS FOR THE CITY

- Continue scaling high-impact policies under four selected themes
- Establish monitoring frameworks to track dietary shifts and emissions impact
- Expand peer learning and collaboration with other cities to accelerate progress

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