



PRECONDITIONS FOR THE "FARM-TO-SCHOOL" MODEL FROM STAKEHOLDERS' PERSPECTIVE: THE CASE OF KLAIPEDA REGION

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Abstract

Farm-to-school programs represent a global movement aimed at bolstering childhood nutrition, enhancing the quality of school meals, and empowering of local markets. However, these initiatives exhibit significant diversity in their implementation strategies across different countries and remain variably defined in both research and program evaluation literature. In the context of the Klaipėda region project, Farm-to-school programs could be conceptualized as initiatives centred around local or regional food procurement, alongside agriculture and nutrition-based educational endeavours. These activities would encompass the provision of locally sourced foods in schools, the facilitation of educational sessions, and the establishment of school gardens, all aimed at bridging the gap between educational institutions, local farmers, food producers, and distributors. The overarching goal is to integrate fresh, locally sourced food into both school cafeterias and curricula. The research findings, based on interviews conducted in the Klaipėda region with municipality specialists, shed light on the specific nuances of possible Farm-to-school program implementation in this region. Key takeaways from the responses include the commitment to regulatory compliance with Green Public Procurement rules, with a strong emphasis on sourcing food produced within Lithuania. Despite their dedication to supporting local agriculture and providing fresh, locally sourced food, these programmes grapple with challenges related to quantity, cost, administrative hurdles, and procurement policies. Decision-making processes are influenced by a diverse array of stakeholders, including municipal bodies and the broader community.

KEYWORDS: Farm-to-school programme, stakeholder involvement, Klaipėda region.

Introduction

Today's world tendencies such as increasing population, growing consumption, the problems of climate change, anthropogenic pollution of the environment, are becoming more prominent and raise the relevant issues of food quality and sufficiency. Growing demand for organic food products requires to rethink the current supply chain approaches for e-grocery and it is estimated that the world population is expected to reach 9.8 billion by 2050, the average life expectancy in Europe will be 82 years by 2050 (Gužauskas and Burinskienė, 2022). The priorities of the world, European, including Baltic countries, strategic documents are related to the goals of implementing sustainability and food strategies. In order to ensure the sustainable development of countries, in 2015 The UN has approved 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which cover the areas of improving the social environment, economic development, environmental protection and cooperation (The Sustainable Development Agenda 2030, 2015). All UN member states are committed to the implementation of these goals, where one of the strategic issues addressed is to eliminate hunger, ensure food self-sufficiency and better nutrition, promote sustainable agriculture. Sustainable and resilient food production systems are key to achieving this goal. Transitioning to sustainable agriculture will help ensure food security in the future as demand increases and the climate changes. Policymakers will need to promote sustainable food production systems and ensure the proper functioning of food markets and access to market information. One of the relevant areas

for achieving this goal is improvement of childhood nutrition and school meals systems.

School meal systems are common throughout the world and are used to promote healthy eating in children and improve learning outcomes (Morgan, Sonnino, 2008). In recent years, there has been increasing emphasis on the possibility of improving school meals by including locally grown products, thus contributing to the development of local economic systems (Sumberg, Wheeler, 2011). This model has been called "Farm-to-school" in practice of some countries and, according to its proponents, emphasizes public procurement of locally grown food as a key market opportunity for farmers (Botkins, Roe, 2018).

Farm-to-school model in different countries has given a start to various initiatives that aim to connect schools with local farmers, food producers, and distributors to provide fresh, locally sourced food in school cafeterias. Generally known as Farm-to-school programmes such initiatives not only promote healthier eating habits among students but also supports local agriculture, strengthen communities, and educate students about where their food comes from. Farm-to-school programmes are common in countries in South America, North America, Asia and Europe, e.g. "Farm Safe Schools" (Ireland), "Food for Life" (England), "From Farm to Cafeteria" (Canada), etc. (<https://foodtank.com/news/2017/10/national-farm-school-initiatives/>).

Although Farm-to-school programmes vary according to place and the people who run them, they typically include one or more of the following programme components: they connect local farmers and food

processors with school cafeterias in preschools (kindergartens), secondary schools (grades 1-12) and colleges, they serve and promote locally produced agricultural products on the lunch line, and they connect youth to food production and preparation through activities such as school gardens, field trips to farms, and chefs in the classroom (Watts et al., 2005). Overall, Farm-to-school programmes promote a holistic approach to education and nutrition, emphasizing the importance of fresh, locally sourced food for students' well-being and the well-being of their communities. Moreover, Farm-to-school programmes align closely with the principles of sustainable development by addressing social, economic, and environmental aspects. It contributes to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by promoting healthier communities, supporting local economies, and fostering environmental sustainability.

An analysis of the experiences of foreign countries implementing Farm-to-school and similar programmes (Ratcliffe, 2012) suggests that the distinctive feature of these programmes is their multi-component nature. The programmes involve schools and farms as well as many other social actors such as state and regional government agencies, nutrition services, hygiene services, public health centers, food processors and manufacturers, etc. These social actors traditionally have different goals and objectives, not necessarily focusing on school meals. Therefore, the need to participate together in creating new school food markets poses certain challenges to those, who seek to deploy similar initiatives.

The present article has been prepared within the framework of the BSR Food Coalition project funded by Interreg Baltic Sea Region Program (contract #S002), the aim of which is to create the conditions for the emergence of the "From farm to school" model in the Baltic States. The study presented in the article is a part of a wider research which has been sought to disclose the conditions and opportunities for the promotion and use of foods produced by local farmers in general education schools in Klaipeda region, Lithuania as well as at defining necessary educational efforts to increase healthy nutrition, develop general health habits, and agricultural and food system literacy within general education schools and their communities. To achieve the aim the project research covered different target groups of social actors in Klaipeda region: farmers and representatives from educational institutions (Melnikova et al., 2023(a); school administrators, students, and parents (Melnikova et al., 2023 (b)). The present piece of research has been specifically sought to involve another group of social actors – municipality procurement specialists of Klaipeda region, who deal with food procurement issues and are involved in decision making regarding school meals and disclose their opinion on the preconditions for the development of Farm-to-school model in Klaipeda region. The present article will highlight the main findings of the interviews thus helping to raise the awareness among all interested groups and promote collaboration.

Theoretical background

The concept of Farm-to school. At a broad level, Farm-to-school programmes share the goals of improving childhood nutrition and school meals as well as supporting local markets (Joshi et al., 2014; Roche et al., 2012). However, there is a great deal of diversity in programme implementation strategies in various countries that are developed to meet these goals, and Farm-to-school is defined in different ways across the research and programme evaluation literature. A primary definition was clarified by a foundational document in Farm-to-school literature, "Evaluation for Transformation" (Joshi et al., 2014), which describes the potential outcomes of Farm-to-school and provides a common language for researchers, programme evaluators, and practitioners. This document broadly describes Farm-to-school as enriching "the connection communities have with local, healthy food and food producers by changing food purchasing and educational activities at schools and preschools" (Joshi et al., 2014, p. 2). Though Farm-to-school programmes are unique and vary by location and school resources, comprehensive programmes, according to this document, include three core elements: (a) procurement of local and regional food products, (b) gardening based at schools and preschools, and (c) education that is food and farm-related. An additional definition that provides an organizing framework is the "3-C" approach embraced by leaders in the Farm-to-school movement, which defines three domains of intervention: the cafeteria, classroom, and community (Bagdonis et al. 2009).

The growing body of literature on Farm-to-school programmes across the countries defines their two main functions generally as:

- procurement and preparation of locally produced foods for school meals and
- experience-based educational activities addressing the agricultural, culinary, and nutritional qualities of such foods (Schafft et al., 2010).

The procurement and preparation component accomplishes four distinct aims. These are to (Izumi et al., 2009; Meter, 2011):

- improve students' nutritional intake;
- create markets for small- and medium-sized farmers in the schools' own communities and regions;
- strengthen local economies by spending a greater percentage of school food services' budgets on foods produced nearby; and
- enhance the natural environment by supporting sustainable agricultural practices.

The experiential educational component of most Farm-to-school programmes has been shown to increase students' appreciation and preferences for healthful foods that are produced locally in an environmentally sound manner and is often portrayed as the overarching goal of Farm-to-school programmes. Farm-to-school is also described as decreasing the social distancing between food production and consumption by fostering efforts which bring food to consumers with the farmer's face or story on it (Barlett, 2009).

Proponents believe that the combined application of both these components of Farm-to-school programme -

local food procurement and experience-based education - is instrumental in encouraging students' consumption of healthful, locally produced food. Research on school gardens demonstrates that experience-based agricultural education increases students' willingness to eat fruits and vegetables (Kloppenburger, Hassanein, 2006; Morris et al., 2000).

In the scope of the BSR Food Coalition project, we define the idea of Farm-to-school programme in Klaipeda region as activities that generally centre around procurement of local or regional foods, agriculture or nutrition-based educational activities such as but not limited to (Renting et al., 2003):

- Serving local food products in schools (meals and snacks);
- Serving local food products in classrooms (snacks, taste tests, educational tools);
- Conducting educational activities related to local foods such as farmers in the classroom and culinary education focused on local foods, field trips to farms, farmers' markets or food processing facilities, and educational sessions for parents and community members;
- Creating and tending school gardens.

Hence, the concept of the Farm-to-school programme in Klaipeda region would revolve around connecting schools with local farmers, food producers, and distributors to integrate fresh, locally sourced food into school cafeterias and educational curricula. It's a multifaceted initiative that encompasses nutrition, education, community engagement, and sustainability. Here's a breakdown of the key components of the Farm-to-school concept that could be valuable for Klaipeda region (Vallianatos et al., 2004; Berkenkamp, 2011):

1. Local food procurement: The programme focuses on sourcing food from local farms and producers, prioritizing fresh, seasonal, and locally grown ingredients. Schools establish relationships with farmers, food cooperatives, and distributors to ensure a steady supply of local produce and products.

2. School cafeteria: Locally sourced foods are integrated into school meal programs, allowing students to enjoy healthier and more nutritious meals. Cafeteria menus reflect seasonal variations in food availability, promoting a diverse range of fresh options.

3. Education and curriculum integration: The Farm-to-school programme extends beyond the cafeteria to the classroom, integrating food and agriculture education into various subjects. Teachers incorporate lessons on farming, nutrition, food systems, and sustainability, providing students with a well-rounded understanding of food sources.

4. Hands-on learning: Students engage in hands-on activities such as gardening, cooking, and food tastings, fostering a deeper connection to their food and its origins. Learning experiences may include field trips to local farms, visits to farmers' markets, and participation in community gardening projects.

5. Community engagement: The programme encourages collaboration between schools, students, parents, farmers, and the wider community. It fosters a sense of community pride and cooperation, promoting the idea of "knowing where your food comes from."

6. Nutrition and health: By offering fresh and nutritious meals, the programme contributes to students' overall health and well-being. It helps develop healthy eating habits early in life, potentially reducing the risk of diet-related health issues.

7. Economic support for local agriculture: Farm-to-school programme provides a market for local farmers, supporting the local agricultural economy and helping farmers sustain their operations.

8. Sustainability and environmental awareness: The concept promotes sustainable agricultural practices by reducing the carbon footprint associated with food transportation. It encourages students to understand the environmental impact of their food choices.

9. Cultural diversity: Farm-to-school initiatives celebrate cultural diversity by incorporating diverse foods and culinary traditions from the local community.

10. Food security: The programme can contribute to addressing food insecurity by providing access to fresh, nutritious foods for all students.

Overall, the Farm-to-school concept is about creating a dynamic and interconnected system that benefits students, communities, local farmers, and the environment. It emphasizes the importance of understanding where food comes from, making healthier food choices, and supporting local economies.

Klaipeda Region has a regional specialisation strategy for 2030 where different measures are dedicated to food topics under the „Bioeconomy“ priority (Klaipeda economic development strategy (2021). One of them is the promotion of an application of green public procurement criteria on the municipal level, also, district municipalities are working actively on the creation of short food supply chains, organizing catering services in the Klaipeda region in public institutions (schools, hospitals, etc.). Also, on the regional level, the importance of educating society and informing about local food value, is being emphasized. Small farms still predominate in Klaipeda region, but it is becoming more and more difficult for them to operate in market conditions, especially during the coronavirus pandemic. The biggest problem is the lack of the necessary infrastructure in Klaipeda region for the successful cooperation of schools and local farms (Melnikova et al., 2023a). Moreover, some other problems have been identified. Neither the heads of educational institutions nor the farmers have the time and ability to devote all their time to the paperwork and documents of public procurement, then to the inspection of goods, logistics, etc. It's just that the system is not developed and does not work smoothly. It is difficult for small farmers to provide purchases and ensure large quantities of products needed (Melnikova et al., 2023a). This requires to further improve the cooperation of regional food chains and farmers. Today, there are legal options to buy food products from farmers, but that path is quite complicated, which is why few choose it. Anyway, Klaipeda region sees its task to promote information and education of the population, why local products and locally produced food are more useful, healthier and better for people.

Previous research has outlined a broad array of social actors involved in the support of and implementation of the Farm-to-school programmes, including local decision

makers, food services providers, distributors, farmers, community partners, school professionals etc. (Conner et al., 2011). Government namely state and regional government agencies can provide funding, grants, and policy support for farm-to-school programmes. They can also help streamline regulations and provide guidance on food safety and procurement practices. Therefore, it is important to disclose their views on the possibilities of Farm-to-school model in Klaipeda region.

Methodology

During the implementation of the project “BSR Food Coalition” the open-question interviews with Klaipeda region stakeholders (municipality specialists) were conducted. The interviews were carried out in October–November 2022. 6 informants were interviewed (table 1).

Coding	Institution and department	Role
S1	Department of Agriculture of Klaipeda region Municipality Administration	Representative
S2	Department of Agriculture of Klaipeda District Municipality Administration	Representative
S3	Association “Klaipeda region”	Representative
S4	Association “Klaipeda region”	Representative
S5	Skuodas district municipality, department of Agriculture	Representative
S6	Skuodas district municipality	Representative

Open-question interviews, also known as open-ended interviews, were chosen as a qualitative data collection research method, as interviewers ask participants broad, open-ended questions to gather in-depth information, insights, and narratives. Unlike closed-ended questions that elicit specific responses, open questions encourage participants to provide detailed, unrestricted responses (Žydzūnaitė, 2006).

The instrument for qualitative data collection was elaborated by project researchers based theoretical analysis of research publications (Conner et al., 2011). It included 7 open questions for stakeholders, namely:

1. There has been recent publicity about locally grown food. How do you define “locally grown”? Probes: Same city, region, or country? Within a specific radius? Within a day’s drive?

2. Can you talk about your food service operation in general education schools? How do your efforts to buy locally grown food fit into the goals of your food service operation?

3. Can you walk me through your procurement procedure for commercial foods? Probes: Who are your vendors (e.g., commercial distributors, shippers, wholesaler, farmers)? What do they offer in terms of products, services, or financial incentives?

4. What factors do you consider when buying locally grown food? Probes: How important is price? Do you consider product attributes such as organic, quality, and local? Does your relationship with your vendor (including farmers) come into play?

5. Can you tell me about your farm to school collaboration (if any)? Probes: How did it get started? How has it changed over the years? Do you have an educational component? Which vendors do you go to for locally grown food? Have you requested locally grown food from your broadline distributor?

6. What could motivate you to begin buying locally grown food? What motivates you to continue buying locally grown food? Probes: What are the benefits of buying locally grown food?

7. What are the challenges, if any, to buying locally grown food? Probes: How do state, or local procurement policies impact your ability to buy locally grown food, if at all? What influence, if any, does school board or municipal education department have on your procurement decisions? What about students, and parents?

The informants’ answers were analysed applying the method of interpretative qualitative data analysis.

Results

The provided answers from research participants shed light on their approach to sourcing locally grown food for general education schools. The informants’ responses to the first question allowed to clear out the definition of “Locally grown food”. For these specialists it includes several criteria, which are as follows: “*Grown in Lithuania*” (S1): This is a national-level definition, indicating that they prioritize domestic agricultural products. “*No matter the distance/the respective region as close as possible to the contract (service) provision place*” (S3). This suggests that informants consider the proximity of the food source to the location where it will be served, showing an emphasis on minimizing transportation distances. “*Same city, region, or country*” (S6). This further refines the concept, indicating that they may consider food from the same city, region, or country as locally grown. Moreover, according to study participants, seasonality is considered, indicating a preference for products that are in season, which, according to them, is “*a common aspect of local sourcing*” (S3).

Informants’ responses to the second question allowed disclosing the issues of food service operation in school in Klaipeda region. The provided information gives insights into the food service operations in general education schools and the integration of locally grown food procurement into their goals.

The food service operations in general education schools vary, with “some schools relying on catering service providers to deliver meals” (S1), and “others having school canteens owned by themselves or by external parties” (S5). This dual approach suggests flexibility in how schools manage their food services.

Regardless of whether school meals are provided by external providers or through school canteens, procurement for food is conducted uniformly across all schools in the county. This uniformity implies a standardized approach to sourcing food products. “*The primary framework guiding food procurement for schools is the adherence to Green Public Procurement rules*” (S3). “*These rules likely focus on environmental and*

sustainability criteria when purchasing products" (S4). This indicates a commitment to environmentally responsible practices.

According to informants, municipalities make an effort to encourage the participation of local farmers in the procurement process. They do this by *"dividing lots and distinguishing smaller regions to facilitate local farmer involvement"* (S3). This approach aligns with the concept of supporting local agriculture and reducing the carbon footprint associated with food transport. A limitation mentioned is *"the practical challenge of having contracts with numerous local farmers"* (S6). This is seen as administratively challenging, and it's acknowledged that such an approach may not be feasible for municipalities. Notably, the study participants mentioned that no additional special efforts are made to specifically procure locally grown food beyond what is required by Green Public Procurement rules. The rationale for this is that *"municipalities believe these rules are sufficient to encourage local farmer participation"* (S3).

The responses also touch on the limitations faced by procurement specialists, including *"a lack of capacity, motivation, and knowledge to go beyond the established requirements"* (S4). This highlights the importance of resources and expertise in shaping procurement decisions.

In summary, the integration of locally grown food procurement into the food service operations of general education schools is primarily driven by adherence to Green Public Procurement rules and a desire to support local farmers where feasible. The approach appears to balance environmental sustainability and practicality, recognizing that managing contracts with numerous local farmers can be challenging. While there is an emphasis on uniformity and compliance, the responses did not delve into potential benefits or drawbacks of this approach, leaving room for further exploration of its implications.

The answers to the third questions allowed distinguishing procurement methods. The specialists explain that there are two methods of providing school meals: *"through catering service providers and by purchasing food directly"* (S1). Both methods adhere to Green Public Procurement requirements. Informants also mention that municipalities try to divide lots and distinguish smaller regions to involve local farmers. However, they also acknowledge practical limitations, such as *"not being able to manage contracts with different farmers"* (S5). It's mentioned that no special additional efforts are made to specifically procure locally grown food beyond what is required by Green Public Procurement rules. The specialists cite reasons such as *"capacity constraints, lack of motivation, and limited knowledge as barriers to going beyond the set requirements"* (S4).

Informants' answers to the fourth question outline the procurement procedure for commercial foods used in the context of schools and highlight some key aspects of their approach.

The procurement procedure involves a range of vendors, including farmers/producers, shippers, and wholesalers. This suggests that schools may consider a variety of sources for their food supply. The responses indicate that vendors, including farmers, shippers, and

wholesalers, *"do not offer any incentives in terms of products, services, or financial incentives due to the nature of the procurement procedure"* (S3). This implies that the procurement process is strictly regulated and does not allow for additional offerings or negotiations with vendors.

The responses state that there is *"no direct link between the needs of schools and local farmers in the region"* (S3). This suggests that the procurement process does not prioritize local sourcing based on the needs of schools or the support of local farmers. Informants also mentioned that the *"needs of farmers are not taken into consideration before procurement"* (S5). This indicates that the procurement process may not involve consultation or collaboration with local farmers to align their capabilities and offerings with the needs of the schools.

It's also noted by the informants that *"prices offered by shippers and wholesalers tend to be lower than those offered by local farmers/producers"* (S3). This suggests that cost efficiency may be a significant factor in the procurement decision-making process.

The informants also talked about the Green Public Procurement procedure, which according to them includes several requirements, namely ensuring that food products do not contain GMOs and meet specific quality standards, traceability of the entire product supply cycle, including producer and supplier affirmations, compliance with organic farming, national food quality scheme, or agricultural products' integrated cultivation requirements throughout the contract period, use of seasonal fruits, berries, and vegetables, following the Ministry of Agriculture's seasonality calendars, limiting food product delivery distances to not more than 250 km from the product's growing/production place to the municipality.

In summary, the procurement procedure outlined appears to be highly regulated, with a focus on adhering to specific quality and sourcing standards, rather than fostering direct relationships with local farmers or incentivizing their participation. Cost considerations and adherence to Green Public Procurement requirements play a significant role in their decision-making process.

The study participants' responses shed light on the motivations and challenges faced by municipalities when it comes to buying locally grown food. The primary motivation for municipalities to start buying locally grown food seems to be related to *"compliance with Green Public Procurement rules"* (S1). They are required to source products grown in Lithuania to meet these regulations. However, the main limitation mentioned is the inability of small farmers *"to provide the necessary quantities"* (S4). Therefore, the motivation to begin buying locally grown food appears to be more regulatory and compliance-driven rather than driven by other potential benefits. In summary, the primary motivation for municipalities to buy locally grown food appears to be regulatory compliance.

The challenges to buying locally grown food in the context of school meal programs are multifaceted and can be influenced by various factors, as indicated in the provided information.

One of the primary challenges is *"the limited quantity of produce that local farmer can provide"* (S6). Small-

scale farmers may not have the capacity to meet the volume demands of larger institutions, such as schools that serve multiple students. This limitation makes it difficult to source all required food locally.

The administrative aspect of procurement is a significant challenge. “Coordinating and managing contracts with small local farmers can be complex and resource-intensive” (S6). “Municipalities or institutions may find it impractical to divide procurement among many small suppliers, as it can become unmanageable” (S3).

According to the informants, “while supporting local farmers is a goal, the cost of locally grown food may be higher than that of larger-scale commercial suppliers” (S3). This can make it challenging to justify the increased cost, especially when budgets are constrained.

Moreover, informants mentioned that “*state or local procurement policies can have a significant impact on the ability to buy locally grown food*” (S4). If these policies prioritize cost savings or are overly restrictive, they may hinder efforts to source locally.

Research participants mentioned that “*the decision-making authority of school boards and municipal education departments can also affect procurement choices*” (S5). These bodies may prioritize factors such as cost, compliance with regulations, and logistics, which can impact the feasibility of local sourcing.

Moreover, research participants added, that “encouraging local farmers to participate in procurement programs can be challenging, particularly if they are not incentivized by pricing or if the administrative burden is high” (S3). Farmers need to see tangible benefits and motivations to engage with school meal programs. On the other hand, according to interviewees, “the preferences and priorities of students and parents can influence procurement decisions to some extent” (S1). If there is a strong community desire for locally sourced and fresh food, it may encourage institutions to overcome some of the challenges associated with local procurement.

In summary, while there are numerous benefits to buying locally grown food, including supporting local economies and providing fresher products, challenges related to quantity, cost, administration, and procurement policies can pose significant hurdles. Balancing these challenges with the desire to source locally is an ongoing consideration for institutions and municipalities involved in school meal programs in Klaipeda region.

Conclusions

The concept of Farm-to-school programmes aims to enhance childhood nutrition, improve school meals, and support local markets. While these programs share common goals, they exhibit diversity in implementation strategies across different countries and are defined variably in research and programme evaluation literature.

The main functions of Farm-to-school programmes, as defined in the literature, encompass the procurement and preparation of locally produced foods for school meals and experience-based educational activities related to agriculture, culinary skills, and nutrition. The procurement component serves to improve students'

nutrition, create markets for local farmers, strengthen local economies, and enhance the natural environment. Meanwhile, the educational component aims to increase students' appreciation and preferences for healthful, locally produced food and decrease the distance between food production and consumption.

In the context of the Klaipeda region project, Farm-to-school programmes are defined as activities centring around local or regional food procurement and agriculture or nutrition-based educational activities. These activities include serving local food in schools, conducting educational sessions, and establishing school gardens. The overarching goal is to connect schools with local farmers, food producers, and distributors to integrate fresh, locally sourced food into school cafeterias and curricula.

The research results based on the interviews provide insights into how Farm-to-school programmes are implemented in the Klaipeda region. Here are key findings from the responses:

Farm-to-school programs in the Klaipeda region are driven by a commitment to regulatory compliance with Green Public Procurement rules, with an emphasis on sourcing food produced in Lithuania. While these programs aim to support local agriculture and provide fresh, locally sourced food, they face challenges related to quantity, cost, administration, and procurement policies. The decisions are influenced by various stakeholders, including municipal bodies and the broader community.

Despite these challenges, the Farm-to-school concept remains a vital initiative with the potential to improve childhood nutrition, support local economies, and foster a connection between students and the sources of their food. Balancing the regulatory requirements with the desire to promote local food sourcing continues to be a central consideration in the Klaipeda region's approach to Farm-to-school programs. Further exploration of the benefits and drawbacks of this approach may be needed to inform future program enhancements.

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