



Funded by
the European Union



Project No. 2024-1-PL01-KA210-VET-000246112

Comparative analysis in the catering industry with the scope of the use of planet-friendly diets in catering

PROJECT „Schoolgarden”

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Introduction

The “Schoolgarden” project was launched under the Erasmus+ program to support sustainable food education and environmental awareness in vocational schools across Europe. Its main goal is to connect students and teachers with nature through the creation and use of school gardens, local herbs, and seasonal vegetables, while at the same time encouraging healthier, more environmentally friendly dietary habits. Through hands-on learning, international cooperation, and creative teaching, the project promotes new ways of thinking about food—both as a source of nourishment and as a way to protect the planet.

The “Schoolgarden” project is implemented by a consortium of partners from Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania.

 The coordinating institution, the Regional Competence Center Foundation (Poland), serves as a bridge between vocational education providers and entrepreneurs. Since 2015, the Foundation has supported vocational schools across the Podlaskie region, helping them align training outcomes with labor market needs through initiatives such as Qualifying Vocational Courses. (<https://rck.org.pl/>)

 The Latvian partner, Rezekne Technical School, educates over 900 students aged 14 to 25 each year, offering secondary vocational education in fields ranging from programming and food production to hotel service and electrical engineering. It is a key institution in the Latgale region. (<https://rezeknestehnikums.lv/>)

 The Lithuanian partner, Verslo ir svetingumo profesinės karjeros centras VESK, is a leading vocational school that specializes in business, hospitality, and gastronomy education, actively promoting innovation and sustainability in culinary training. (<https://www.vesk.lt/>)

In Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland, the focus on planetary diets is gaining importance. The countries face similar challenges: high levels of meat consumption, increasing rates of diet-related diseases, and growing concern about the climate impact of the food system. At the same time, all three countries share a rich tradition of vegetable-based seasonal cooking and access to local, wild-grown herbs and plants. By reviving these traditions in a modern context,



vocational schools and the catering industry can lead the shift toward more sustainable food practices.

This report presents a cross-country comparative analysis of how planetary diet principles are reflected in catering and vocational education across Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland. It examines national trends, vocational school curricula, catering practices, consumer awareness, and the barriers and opportunities for change.

The key questions addressed include:

- How is the concept of a planetary diet understood and applied in each country?
- What role do vocational schools play in shaping sustainable food knowledge?
- How are restaurants and caterers responding to the demand for plant-based and eco-friendly meals?
- What are the main differences and shared challenges across the three countries?

By answering these questions, the report aims to identify effective strategies, highlight good practices, and propose targeted actions for educators, policy makers, and food professionals.

This comparative analysis was developed using the following sources and methods:

- National Reports: Official project reports from Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland prepared under the Erasmus+ "Schoolgarden" project served as the primary sources. These included qualitative and quantitative data, expert insights, and case studies on plant-based diets in catering and vocational education.
- Lithuanian, Latvian, and Polish sources, including NGO reports (e.g., Gyvi Gali, CIAGALI), news articles, government nutrition guidelines, and published studies on sustainable food systems in the region.
- Comparative Framework: A common structure was applied to each country's report, focusing on four themes: (1) Definitions and principles of planetary food, (2) Integration in vocational education, (3) Practices in the catering sector, and (4) Current and emerging food trends.



1. Planetary Food – Introduction and Definitions

What is Planetary Food?

Planetary food refers to dietary patterns that aim to improve both human health and planetary sustainability. This concept is rooted in the idea that our food choices directly influence global ecological outcomes—such as greenhouse gas emissions, water use, biodiversity loss, and soil degradation. The term gained global prominence following the EAT-Lancet Commission report in 2019, which proposed a universal reference diet primarily composed of plant-based foods, with reduced animal product consumption.

Key elements of the planetary diet include:

- A high intake of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, and nuts.
- Limited amounts of red meat and dairy products.
- Minimal intake of added sugars, refined grains, and ultra-processed foods.
- Preference for seasonal, local, and sustainably produced ingredients.

The goal is to feed 10 billion people by 2050 without destroying the planet.

Definitions from the Field

— The Latvian report reveals that the concept of planetary food is not widely recognized by name, but the principles are partially applied through interest in healthy eating, local foods, and school gardening initiatives. In public and school catering, menus rarely carry a clear sustainability focus, although vegetables like cabbage, potatoes, and apples are commonly used. There is some movement toward organic produce, but often limited by costs and procurement rules.



Seasonal, plant-based ingredients in line with planetary diet principles at Rezekne Technikums.

 In Poland, planetary food principles are better known among young people and urban consumers, where vegan and vegetarian options are gaining popularity. There is a growing organic market, and many Polish consumers associate plant-based eating with wellness trends. However, catering establishments are still reluctant to reduce meat due to perceived customer resistance, and the idea of environmentally sustainable menus is just starting to gain traction.

 In Lithuania, the term "planetary diet" is still emerging. Some initiatives by NGOs (e.g., Gyvi Gali) promote plant-based alternatives, and some urban restaurants now include vegan burgers, legume dishes, or plant milks. Yet most catering institutions still follow traditional norms: meat at lunch, dairy for snacks, potatoes as a base.

The Health Argument for Planetary Food

Numerous scientific studies—including the EAT-Lancet report—emphasize that a plant-forward diet helps to prevent:

- Cardiovascular diseases
- Type 2 diabetes



- Obesity and certain cancers
- Digestive disorders

In Lithuania, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are a leading cause of mortality, often tied to high saturated fat and low fiber diets. Transitioning to more plant-based eating could significantly improve public health. Similarly, both Latvia and Poland report increasing concern over diet-related illnesses and obesity rates.

Common plant-based foods in country-specific diets that align with health goals:

- Fermented foods (e.g., sauerkraut, kefir)
- Whole grains (e.g., barley, rye)
- Root vegetables (e.g., beets, carrots)
- Legumes (e.g., peas, beans – though underused)

Environmental Benefits of Plant-Based Diets

The food system is a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, land and water use, and biodiversity loss. Diets high in meat and dairy have significantly greater environmental impacts than plant-based diets.

Across the countries, agricultural emissions are high due to livestock farming and the extensive use of imported feeds. If more people adopted flexitarian or vegetarian eating habits, the environmental footprint of food production could be greatly reduced.

Key environmental benefits:

- Lower carbon footprint
- Reduced water use
- Less land required for animal feed
- Decrease in deforestation and habitat loss



Cultural and Traditional Aspects

Traditional cuisine can be seen both as a barrier and an opportunity:

- Barrier: Heavy use of meat, dairy, and white flour, often perceived as essential to national identity.

Opportunity: Many traditional recipes are naturally plant-based or adaptable, such as:

- Šaltibarščiai (cold beet soup) – easily veganized
- Barley porridge or buckwheat pancakes
- Use of wild herbs and forest berries

Engaging with food heritage from a sustainability lens could make planetary food more relatable.

Planetary food is more than just a diet—it represents a broader shift in how societies approach food, sustainability, and public health. Across Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland, the concept is steadily gaining ground, supported by international cooperation, evolving consumer preferences, and growing awareness of health and environmental issues. Although each country progresses at its own pace, all three are witnessing increased interest in plant-based practices within vocational education, public catering, and the hospitality industry. While traditional eating habits and practical challenges still pose barriers, the potential for planetary diets to positively influence food culture and sustainability in the region is clearly emerging.

2. Planetary Food in Vocational School Curricula

Vocational education plays a critical role in shaping the next generation of chefs, food professionals, and hospitality workers. Integrating planetary food principles into the curricula of culinary and hospitality schools is essential for transforming the future of food systems. In Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland, this shift is slowly taking root, with varying degrees of implementation and awareness.

Incorporating planet-friendly diets into the training of vocational students allows them to:



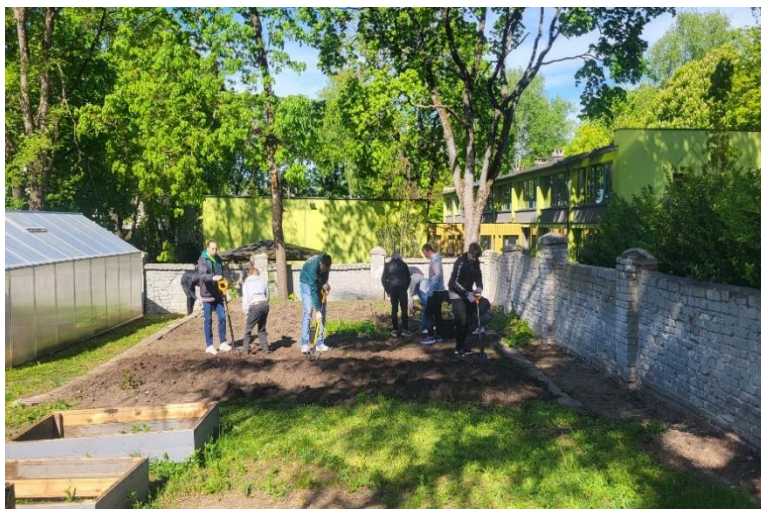
- Learn sustainable food preparation techniques.
- Understand the impact of food on health and the environment.
- Develop skills that match emerging trends in food service industries.
- Advocate for sustainable practices in their future workplaces.



Lithuania: Embedding Sustainability in Culinary Education

In Lithuania, vocational schools such as Verslo ir svetingumo profesinės karjeros centras (VESK) have begun integrating sustainability into their culinary training programs. Students are taught to prepare meals using a variety of plant-based ingredients, including locally available produce like buckwheat, lentils, cabbage, and potatoes. Lessons focus on cooking techniques that preserve nutritional value—such as steaming, baking, and sautéing—while also introducing healthy eating principles like low-fat preparation and reduced sugar use. These plant-forward approaches are increasingly common in both classroom cooking and culinary competitions.

Some schools have also established small greenhouses and herb gardens, allowing students to grow and use fresh ingredients like parsley, thyme, mint, tomatoes, and lettuce. These school-grown herbs and vegetables are integrated into lessons to reinforce the concepts of freshness, seasonality, and flavor development. Students also receive instruction on reducing food waste, practicing portion control, and reusing leftovers creatively to minimize environmental impact.



VESK students engaged in hands-on learning inside the school's greenhouse.

While these developments signal real progress, the transition toward planetary diets is not without its challenges. Key obstacles include limited chef training in plant-based cuisine, the persistence of meat-heavy culinary traditions, and a perception that sustainable menus are less practical or cost-effective, particularly in conventional or institutional settings.

Latvia: Early-Stage Engagement with Sustainability

Latvia is at the early stages of incorporating sustainability into its vocational culinary education. According to the Latvian Schoolgarden report, most school programs still focus on traditional recipes and basic vegetable preparation, with little structured content on plant-based or planetary diets. The use of local and seasonal produce is fairly common, but often driven more by economic necessity than environmental awareness.

Some vocational schools participate in pilot projects or health promotion campaigns, and a few have experimented with school gardens or outdoor herb growing. However, these efforts remain scattered and largely dependent on the initiative of individual educators. Teachers report a need for more structured guidance, visual teaching tools, and menu planning examples to help them incorporate sustainability topics effectively into everyday training.

Despite these early efforts, vocational schools in Latvia face multiple challenges in fully embracing sustainability-focused food education. These include a lack of modern learning



materials, limited teacher training opportunities, and low engagement from both students and the broader school community in plant-based practices.

Poland: Embracing Modern Food Trends in Education

Vocational culinary schools in Poland have made more visible progress in introducing themes related to planetary diets, particularly in urban regions. Many institutions now offer elective modules in vegetarian and vegan cooking, nutritional health, and ethical food choices. Students are encouraged to experiment with plant-based proteins, meat substitutes, and innovative vegetable-based recipes that reflect modern dietary trends.

A notable focus in Poland is placed on zero-waste cooking, fermentation techniques, and sustainability practices that align with both traditional and contemporary food systems. Schools often collaborate with organic farms, plant-based chefs, and eco-conscious restaurants to organize workshops, field trips, and guest lectures. These partnerships enhance the learning experience and help students understand the broader value chain of sustainable food production.

Teachers note that student interest is high, particularly among younger learners who are motivated by climate concerns, animal welfare, and personal health. These developments show that Poland's vocational education system is steadily evolving to align with global food trends and sustainability goals.

Good Practices Across Countries

Country	Good Practices in Schools			Notes
Lithuania	Greenhouse cultivation, vegetable dishes			Plant-based dishes introduced slowly; school garden use
Latvia	Use of seasonal/local produce, pilot school garden projects			Curriculum lacks clear focus on planetary food
Poland	Vegan cooking modules, teacher training, external partnerships			Urban schools lead, but rural areas lag behind



Vocational schools are vital change agents in building sustainable food systems. Across Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland, examples of progress are visible, though the depth and reach vary.



Recommendations:

- Develop shared European teaching modules on planetary diets.
- Provide visual and hands-on tools for sustainable cooking education.
- Build school garden infrastructure to reinforce learning.
- Strengthen school-industry partnerships with sustainable businesses.
- Encourage student-led projects, such as designing their own green menus.

By shaping students' mindsets and skills now, vocational schools can influence broader shifts toward planetary health in catering and hospitality for the future.

3. Catering Sector Analysis – Use of Planet-Friendly Diets in Practice

The catering sector—comprising restaurants, cafeterias, hotels, school canteens, and event caterers—plays a critical role in promoting planet-friendly diets. As public awareness about health and environmental impacts grows, catering businesses across Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland are slowly adapting. However, the pace and nature of this change differ between countries, shaped by market demand, customer expectations, and national policies.

This section analyzes the current state of planetary food integration in the catering sector of the three countries based on stakeholder interviews, reports, and real-world examples.



Lithuania: Growing Interest, Limited Scale

In Lithuania, awareness of plant-based diets is growing, especially in urban centers such as Vilnius, Kaunas, and Klaipėda, where restaurants and cafés are beginning to expand their menus to include more vegetarian and vegan options. These include beet burgers, lentil soups, and tofu-based dishes, reflecting both health concerns and consumer curiosity. However, the pace of change in the hotel sector is slower. While some hotels have introduced plant-based milk or gluten-free options, most continue to rely on conventional menus heavily based on meat and dairy products.



Examples of good practice include RoseHip Vegan Bistro, a popular Vilnius-based restaurant with a fully plant-based menu and a commitment to sustainable packaging. Sugamour café, also in Vilnius, offers a wide range of vegetarian and vegan brunches that appeal to both locals and visitors. Despite these efforts, barriers remain—many businesses still lack training in plant-based cooking, perceive such menus as less profitable, and face limited demand in rural regions.

Teachers involved in gastronomy education also note a gap between market trends and training content, highlighting the need for improved communication between the food industry and vocational schools. Furthermore, while some establishments experiment with organic ingredients and wild herbs, these practices are still far from mainstream.



Students and teachers from VESK presenting homegrown fruits, vegetables, and plant-based snacks during a school garden tasting event, promoting healthy and seasonal eating.

Latvia: Modest Progress with Isolated Innovations

Latvia's catering and hotel industry is in the early stages of adopting planetary food principles. While traditional dishes still dominate the market, especially outside of Riga, a growing number of urban cafés and restaurants are starting to include plant-forward meals in their offerings. This change is mostly led by young entrepreneurs who are attuned to eco-conscious consumer values. For example, MiiT Coffee in Riga is known for its vegan-friendly dishes and commitment to using local, seasonal produce.



Despite these positive developments, most businesses face significant limitations. Many caterers and hotel kitchens are unfamiliar with plant-based cooking techniques, and staff often lack formal training in vegetarian or vegan cuisine. The perceived high cost of sustainable ingredients, combined with low consumer demand in smaller towns, discourages widespread change. Moreover, few restaurants have formal sustainability policies or sourcing guidelines.

However, there is potential for growth. Beverages infused with fresh herbs, such as sea buckthorn drinks or herbal teas, are gaining popularity and could serve as entry points for more eco-conscious offerings. Teachers in culinary schools report a need for clearer examples of sustainable practices and closer collaboration with food service businesses to bridge the current gap between education and market needs.



Poland: Innovation and Demand Driving Rapid Growth

Poland is experiencing the fastest adoption of plant-based and sustainable practices in the catering and hotel sectors among the three countries. In major cities such as Warsaw, Kraków, and Gdańsk, consumers are increasingly seeking out restaurants that offer vegan menus, organic ingredients, and climate-friendly meals. Businesses are responding with innovation. Restaurants like Krowarzywa Vegan Burger have achieved mainstream popularity by offering affordable, locally sourced, fully vegan meals in a fast-casual format.

Hotels and catering services are also adapting. Many now offer vegetarian breakfast buffets, seasonal menus, and partnerships with local farms to supply produce. Beverage trends include smoothies and drinks enhanced with fresh herbs and wild berries, combining wellness and sustainability. Zero-waste cooking techniques, use of reusable packaging, and eco-labeling are becoming more common, especially in restaurants targeting health-conscious or environmentally aware customers.

Still, challenges remain in rural areas where traditional meat-based diets dominate and access to plant-based ingredients can be more limited. Some educators and professionals note the importance of continued training for chefs, along with improved public awareness campaigns that promote sustainability not as a luxury, but as a necessary and achievable standard in food service.



Conclusion and Recommendations

Across all three countries, the urban catering scene is the key driver of change. Restaurants and caterers that target younger or health-conscious clients are more likely to adopt plant-forward practices. However, the public and school sectors remain slow due to regulations, habits, and lack of trained personnel.

Key recommendations for the region:

- Train chefs and caterers in plant-based techniques through workshops, modules, and exchanges.
- Encourage public procurement guidelines that favor local, seasonal, and plant-based ingredients.
- Provide financial incentives or recognition for sustainable food providers.
- Share success stories to build momentum and normalize plant-based choices.

4. Consumer Perceptions and Awareness – Shaping Demand for Planet-Friendly Diets

Consumer behavior is a powerful force in the food system. How people perceive plant-based and sustainable diets affects how quickly the market and catering industry adapt. This section compares the attitudes, motivations, and barriers among consumers in Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland regarding planet-friendly food choices, based on national surveys, interviews, and reports.



Lithuania: Growing Awareness Among Youth, Tradition Still Strong

In Lithuania, consumer interest in plant-based food is steadily increasing, particularly among younger generations who are motivated by health, ethics, and sustainability. Many young people have been influenced by international travel and Erasmus+ exchanges, where they are exposed to diverse food cultures and more plant-forward eating habits. Health concerns such as avoiding processed meats, managing cholesterol levels, and improving digestive health are leading reasons for exploring vegetarian options. Ethical issues like animal welfare and climate change also play a growing role in shaping dietary choices.



A 2024 survey by the NGO Gyvi Gali highlighted this trend: 48% of respondents had tried a vegetarian meal in the past month, 19% identified as flexitarians, and 9% as vegetarian or vegan. However, significant barriers persist, including limited menu options in rural areas and school cafeterias, along with a general lack of knowledge about plant-based cooking.

Shopping behavior reflects the evolving preferences. Consumers increasingly purchase locally grown vegetables, fermented products like kefir and sauerkraut, and plant-based milk alternatives such as oat and soy. While supermarkets now carry more vegan-labeled products, the price and availability of high-quality options can vary significantly, especially outside urban centers.

Latvia: Conservative Attitudes with Pockets of Change

Latvian consumers generally maintain strong cultural ties to traditional food, especially during holidays and social gatherings, where meat and dairy dishes dominate. However, there are signs of change, particularly among urban students and professionals who are more open to exploring lighter and plant-based meals. This emerging shift appears to be influenced by global health trends and local startup cafés that promote creative vegetarian options.

According to the Schoolgarden report (2024), around 30% of Latvian consumers expressed an interest in reducing meat intake. However, obstacles remain: plant-based dishes are often seen as expensive, less satisfying, or suited only for a niche group. In some cases, the label “vegan” itself is a deterrent. Customers prefer when meals are promoted for taste and quality, rather than ideology.

In schools, vegetarian menu options are still uncommon. Nevertheless, students who participate in project-based education or Erasmus+ exchanges demonstrate a greater openness to sustainable food practices. These experiences help foster awareness, but broader institutional changes are needed to support more plant-based choices in school and public catering.

Poland: Demand Fueled by Health, Climate, and Innovation

Polish consumers—particularly in urban centers—are leading a strong shift toward plant-based eating, driven by a mix of health concerns, eco-awareness, and access to innovative products. Campaigns linking meat consumption to climate change have gained traction,



especially among the youth. Rising rates of lifestyle diseases like diabetes and obesity are also encouraging people to adopt healthier, more balanced diets.

Survey data shows that 50% of adults in Poland are actively reducing meat consumption, and the plant-based food market has grown by more than 30% between 2021 and 2024. This demand is supported by the widespread availability of ready-made vegan meals, meat alternatives, and plant-based snacks in stores and restaurants.

In education, pilot programs such as Meat-Free Mondays are being introduced in schools, particularly in cities like Kraków and Poznań. These schools now serve vegetarian soups, legume-based stews, and smoothies, helping normalize plant-based eating for children and families. Government nutrition guidelines also encourage the use of traditional grains like millet, buckwheat, and barley, which align with both health and sustainability goals.



Summary and Insights

Consumers in Poland are leading the shift, particularly in urban areas where sustainability is part of modern lifestyles. Lithuanian consumers show moderate interest, especially among the youth, but cultural habits remain a strong influence. Latvian consumers are the least aware, with limited access to information or appealing options in the catering sector.

To influence consumer behavior, the following strategies are recommended:

- Link food to health: Emphasize benefits like digestion, energy, and disease prevention.
- Promote traditional plant-based meals (e.g., barley porridge, bean stews, fermented vegetables).
- Use role models, chefs, and media to normalize sustainable choices.
- Provide tasting opportunities in schools, festivals, and food fairs to overcome fear of the unknown.

5. Educational Practices and Vocational Training: Shaping the Next Generation of Food Professionals

Education is a key driver of dietary and sustainability change. What future chefs, hospitality workers, and food producers learn during their vocational training can influence the



entire food service industry. This section compares how planet-friendly diets and sustainability concepts are integrated into vocational education systems in Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland.

Lithuania: A Growing Focus on Sustainability in Gastronomy Training

Lithuanian vocational schools, such as Verslo ir svetingumo profesinės karjeros centras, are increasingly incorporating sustainability into culinary education. Students receive training in vegetarian and plant-based cuisine, nutrient-preserving cooking methods, and strategies for reducing food waste. Practical lessons focus on techniques such as steaming, sautéing, roasting, and fermenting vegetables—methods that not only enhance flavor but also preserve nutrients and promote gut health. Plant-based dishes are now more frequently included in school culinary competitions and hands-on cooking modules, reflecting both student interest and emerging industry trends.

A key strength of the Lithuanian approach is the integration of Erasmus+ internships, which allow students to gain international experience in countries like Italy, Sweden, and Spain. These placements expose them to diverse plant-based cooking styles and organic farming practices. Upon returning, students often share their newly acquired skills and perspectives with classmates and teachers, contributing to a broader adoption of sustainable and innovative food practices in their schools.

Several Lithuanian vocational schools maintain their own herb gardens and greenhouses where students grow ingredients such as mint, thyme, oregano, tomatoes, lettuce, and beets. These school gardens provide a direct connection to seasonal and local produce, reinforcing the farm-to-fork concept. The integration of garden-grown herbs and vegetables into daily lessons helps students better understand the value of freshness, biodiversity, and sustainability in everyday cooking.

Latvia: Early Stages of Practical Implementation

In Latvia, sustainability is acknowledged within broader educational goals, but vocational schools have yet to establish a clear or consistent focus on planetary diets. While the importance of healthy eating and environmental responsibility is recognized, plant-based cooking and sustainable gastronomy are typically addressed through isolated efforts. These may take the



form of individual teacher initiatives or short-term project-based learning modules, rather than being embedded within the core curriculum.



Sliced rhubarb prepared by Rezekne Technikums students during lab-based culinary practice as part of sustainability-focused training.

Latvian vocational schools face several challenges in integrating planet-friendly food practices. Many teachers lack access to up-to-date training or resources on eco-cooking and plant-based culinary methods. As a result, there is limited classroom exposure to sustainable kitchen practices. Additionally, students often associate plant-based meals with upscale restaurants or niche lifestyle trends, rather than with every day, affordable cooking. This perception presents a barrier to normalizing sustainable diets in vocational training.

Nonetheless, there are encouraging examples of innovation. One vocational school in Riga implemented a pilot project that incorporated wild herbs and berries into student recipes. This initiative allowed learners to explore local biodiversity, flavor combinations, and seasonal food sourcing. Although the project was temporary, it demonstrated the educational potential of hands-on learning and could serve as a model for future sustainable food initiatives in Latvian schools.



Poland: Expanding Eco-Culinary Awareness

Polish vocational schools are showing growing interest in sustainable gastronomy, particularly in urban regions where awareness of health, climate, and ethical food choices is on the rise. In several schools, elements of planetary diets are introduced through elective modules or extracurricular programs focused on modern food trends, vegetarian cuisine, and zero-waste cooking. Students are encouraged to experiment with plant-based proteins such as tofu, lentils, and chickpeas, and to incorporate fermented foods into their recipes—reflecting both traditional practices and global culinary influences.

However, the integration of planetary diets in Polish vocational education still faces several obstacles. There is a clear urban-rural divide: while schools in larger cities have better access to resources and progressive curriculum options, those in rural areas continue to follow more traditional meat-based training models. Additionally, access to alternative plant-based ingredients is limited in some regions, and students may encounter cultural perceptions that plant-forward diets are unfamiliar or less satisfying. These factors can make it difficult to scale up sustainable food education nationwide.

Despite these challenges, some schools have taken steps toward innovation. Pilot programs and teacher training workshops focused on sustainability and modern nutrition have been successfully implemented in select institutions. Partnerships with local farms and participation in EU-funded projects have helped provide practical exposure to organic and seasonal food sourcing. These initiatives suggest a growing readiness within Poland's vocational education system to adopt and promote planet-friendly diets more systematically.



The Regional Competence Center Foundation has conducted courses in the field of dietary cuisine such as Flexiplant or Gastrowaste.



Recommendations

- Support teachers with workshops and materials on sustainable and plant-based cooking. Include field trips to organic farms or food hubs in culinary training programs.
- Promote garden-based learning to connect students with biodiversity and seasonal food systems.
- Recognize eco-gastronomy skills in student certification and competitions.
- Encourage peer-to-peer exchanges between Baltic and Polish schools to share best practices.

6. Restaurant and Catering Sector Implementation: Practices and Progress in Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland

The catering and hospitality industry plays a crucial role in shaping consumer behavior and dietary patterns. As awareness grows around sustainability and health, restaurants, hotels, cafés, and bakeries are beginning to respond — though at varied speeds across the Baltic region and Poland. This section compares how planet-friendly diets are used and promoted in food service sectors in Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland, highlighting trends, challenges, and good practices.



Lithuania: Slowly Growing Awareness, Room for Expansion

Although traditional Lithuanian cuisine remains heavily centered on meat—particularly pork and sausages—there is a noticeable shift occurring in the country’s urban food scene. In cities like Vilnius, Kaunas, and Klaipėda, an increasing number of restaurants now include vegetarian and vegan options on their menus. Popular offerings include beet and bean-based burgers, lentil soups, and tofu stir-fries, often designed to appeal to younger, health-conscious diners.

Cafés have been quicker than hotels to adapt to plant-based trends. Many now offer plant-based milk alternatives, gluten-free pastries, and a selection of vegetarian-friendly snacks and desserts. Meanwhile, a small but growing number of high-end restaurants are embracing more innovative sustainable practices, such as fermentation, foraging for wild herbs, and focusing on seasonal vegetable-based dishes. Despite this, many smaller eateries and regional establishments still rely on conventional, meat-heavy menus, often due to tradition or limited customer demand.

Several businesses stand out for their forward-thinking approach to plant-based dining. RoseHip Vegan Bistro in Vilnius offers a fully vegan menu and integrates sustainable packaging into its operations. Another example, Sugamour café, provides a wide variety of plant-based brunch options, reflecting the growing demand for modern, health-conscious meals in Lithuania’s capital.

However, the transition is not without its challenges. Many restaurants still lack the knowledge or motivation to redesign their menus to include more plant-based offerings. There is also a common perception that plant-based meals are less profitable, especially in rural areas where demand is lower. Surveys indicate that most consumers choose plant-based dishes primarily for health reasons, and this choice is more common among young adults and international visitors than among the general population.

Latvia: Innovation in Urban Centers, Traditionalism in Regions

In Latvia, the shift toward plant-based diets in the catering sector is happening slowly and unevenly. In the capital city Riga, a modest but growing number of restaurants and cafés have started offering



vegetarian and vegan dishes, often driven by younger entrepreneurs and a niche urban customer base. These include creative uses of locally grown vegetables, legumes, and plant-based desserts. However, outside of Riga, most food service providers still rely heavily on traditional, meat-centered menus, with limited availability of plant-based alternatives.

There is increasing interest in the use of local wild herbs, berries, and forest mushrooms, which are abundant in Latvia's natural environment and align well with the concept of sustainable eating. Some urban restaurants are incorporating ingredients like sea buckthorn, nettles, and sorrel into their menus, particularly in drinks and desserts. However, this innovation is still limited to a few businesses.

A notable example of good practice is MiiT Coffee in Riga, which is well-known for its vegan pastries, plant-based lunches, and its use of seasonal Latvian produce. This café appeals to students, young professionals, and eco-conscious consumers, and demonstrates the commercial viability of sustainable menus when paired with quality and creativity.

Despite these promising developments, the broader adoption of planet-friendly diets in Latvia's catering industry remains constrained. Many restaurant owners report low consumer demand, especially in smaller towns. There is also a perception that plant-based food is less filling or only suited to certain lifestyles, which discourages chefs from investing in plant-based innovation. In addition, limited seasonal availability of vegetables in the colder months can pose challenges for consistent menu planning.

Poland: More Structured Adoption and Innovation

Among the three countries examined, Poland shows the strongest momentum in adapting plant-based and planet-friendly food practices in its catering sector. In urban areas such as Warsaw, Kraków, and Wrocław, plant-based restaurants and vegan cafés have become a regular feature of the food landscape. These establishments offer a wide range of innovative dishes, including vegan burgers, millet cutlets, lentil curries, and plant-based desserts. Consumer interest is high, and food businesses have responded with greater creativity and product development.



Hotels, particularly those part of international chains or wellness-focused accommodations, are also introducing plant-based breakfast options, vegetarian lunch buffets, and sustainably sourced ingredients. Cafés and bakeries in larger cities now commonly offer oat or soy milk, vegan baked goods, and zero-waste packaging.

A standout example is the Krowarzywa Vegan Burger chain, which has become one of Poland's leading vegan fast-casual brands. It offers locally sourced, affordable, and highly customizable plant-based meals. Other restaurants participate in "Meatless Monday" initiatives, promote seasonal vegetables, and host events focused on sustainability and food awareness.

However, challenges persist—particularly in rural areas, where meat remains a central part of the diet and plant-based cuisine is often met with skepticism. Some chefs still lack formal training in vegan cooking, and access to plant-based ingredients can be more limited outside major cities. Nonetheless, the Polish catering sector demonstrates a clear shift toward sustainability, led by a combination of consumer demand, culinary innovation, and NGO-supported food education.



Opportunities and Recommendations

- Train chefs and kitchen staff in plant-based cooking techniques through workshops or EU-funded projects.
- Encourage food service companies to pilot seasonal menus with more local vegetables and grains.
- Increase use of wild herbs and garden produce, particularly in sauces, teas, and garnishes.
- Promote best practices through industry awards, blogs, or public rankings.
- Consider national or regional campaigns, like "Eat More Plants," targeting restaurants and their customers.

7. Consumer Expectations and Diet Trends 2025

Consumer behavior is one of the strongest drivers for change in the food sector. In recent years, the food choices of people in Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland have evolved, influenced by global health concerns, environmental awareness, ethical considerations, and exposure to



international cuisines. This section explores current dietary preferences, motivation factors, and barriers to adopting planet-friendly diets across the three countries, based on available reports, surveys, and observed trends in the catering industry.

Lithuania: Young Consumers Leading the Shift

In Lithuania, growing health awareness is one of the key drivers behind the shift toward more plant-based diets. Many people are trying to reduce their intake of processed meats and saturated fats, aiming to lower cholesterol and prevent non-communicable diseases. Among younger Lithuanians, motivations also include ethical concerns, such as animal welfare and environmental sustainability. International mobility, including Erasmus+ exchanges, has played an important role in shaping dietary attitudes. Exposure to Mediterranean and Scandinavian food cultures during internships abroad encourages young Lithuanians to explore diverse and plant-forward eating habits upon returning home.

A 2024 survey conducted by the NGO Gyvi Gali provided useful insight into consumer behavior. It found that 48% of Lithuanians had tried a vegetarian meal in the previous month. Nineteen percent of respondents followed a flexitarian diet, incorporating mostly plant-based meals while occasionally consuming meat, and 9% identified as vegetarian or vegan. The main barriers to broader adoption of plant-based eating were identified as lack of knowledge and limited availability of options, particularly in small towns and public institutions such as school cafeterias.

Shopping behavior is also changing. Consumers are increasingly seeking out locally grown vegetables, fermented foods such as kefir and sauerkraut, and plant-based milk alternatives, including oat and soy. Lithuanian supermarkets have responded by offering more vegan-labeled products, though concerns remain about the price and consistency in quality, especially outside urban areas.

Latvia: Between Tradition and Emerging Trends

Latvian consumers are generally loyal to traditional food customs, particularly during festive occasions and family gatherings, where meat and dairy-based meals dominate. However, a noticeable shift is occurring among urban professionals and students, who are



beginning to appreciate lighter, more diverse diets. This growing interest in dietary change is driven by both personal health concerns and increased access to plant-based food options in urban settings.

According to findings from the Schoolgarden Latvian report (2024), approximately 30% of consumers expressed a desire to reduce their meat consumption. Despite this, significant barriers remain, including the higher perceived cost of plant-based food, assumptions that it lacks flavor or satiety, and the deep-rooted social norm of eating meat-centric meals. Interestingly, Latvian customers are more receptive when plant-based meals are promoted for their taste and creativity, rather than being explicitly labeled as “vegan” or “vegetarian,” which can still carry stigma in certain social groups.

In schools, vegetarian options are rare, and sustainable eating habits are not widely reflected in institutional catering. However, students who participate in Erasmus+ projects or hands-on environmental education show greater openness to trying sustainable foods. These experiences provide valuable exposure to alternative food systems and can inspire change both in schools and at home.

Poland: A Surge in Eco-Conscious Eating

Poland has seen a remarkable increase in flexitarian and vegetarian diets, particularly in the last five years. Consumers are becoming more aware of the health and environmental impacts of meat-heavy diets, and both supermarkets and restaurants are responding with a wide array of plant-based products. Recent surveys show that 50% of Polish adults are actively trying to reduce meat consumption, and the plant-based food market has grown by over 30% between 2021 and 2024—especially in urban areas like Warsaw and Wrocław.

This shift is driven by multiple factors. Climate awareness campaigns, linking food choices to environmental sustainability, have gained traction, especially among younger consumers. Health concerns, including rising rates of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease, are also motivating people to seek lighter, more balanced diets. Additionally, the growing availability of convenient plant-based options—such as ready-made vegan meals in supermarkets—has made it easier for consumers to adopt these changes without compromising on time or taste.



Schools are also taking steps to reflect these evolving food trends. In cities like Kraków and Poznań, pilot programs have introduced Meat-Free Mondays, and canteens now serve plant-based soups, lentil stews, and fruit-based snacks and smoothies. Moreover, government-backed nutritional guidelines increasingly emphasize the use of diverse grains such as millet, buckwheat, and barley, helping students become more familiar with sustainable and traditional Polish ingredients in a modern context.



Observations and Recommendations

- Education and communication campaigns can demystify plant-based meals and show their health benefits, especially in rural areas.
- Encourage retailers and school kitchens to offer affordable, familiar-tasting alternatives (e.g., barley risotto, mushroom patties).
- Promote plant-based meals as flavorful and filling, not as diet restrictions.
- Involve young consumers as ambassadors of change through media, school projects, and cooking competitions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The comparative analysis of Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland reveals a growing, though uneven, interest in planet-friendly diets across the Baltic region. All three countries have taken first steps to align their catering practices with sustainability goals, particularly by integrating more plant-based foods, raising awareness of the health and environmental impact of meat consumption, and encouraging schools and restaurants to offer more seasonal and local produce. However, there are still significant gaps in knowledge, implementation, and public acceptance—especially outside of large cities.



Students at the Regional Competence Center Foundation preparing 'pan con tomate' as part of a dietary cuisine course focused on healthy, plant-based cooking techniques.

Vocational education plays a key role in shaping future food professionals and influencing the wider food culture. While vocational schools in all three countries have introduced elements of healthy and sustainable cooking, the depth and consistency of this content vary. More structured training for gastronomy teachers could help ensure that planetary food concepts are taught not only as trends, but as essential principles of modern culinary education. Students trained under this model will be better equipped to meet changing market demands and contribute to healthier and more sustainable catering practices.

To support this shift, we recommend the development of a Training Program for Gastronomy Teachers, covering the following topics:



Suggested Topics for a Training Program on Planet-Friendly Diets

1. **Introduction to Planetary Health and Diets**
 - EAT-Lancet Commission principles
 - Local adaptations in Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland
 - Environmental and health benefits
2. **Plant-Based Culinary Techniques**
 - Protein-rich legumes and grains in traditional and modern cuisine
 - Meat alternatives: tofu, seitan, pulses, mushrooms
 - Preserving taste and texture in vegetarian dishes
3. **Cooking for Nutrition**
 - Nutrient-preserving methods: steaming, low-temperature baking, raw dishes
 - Fermented foods and gut health (e.g., kefir, sauerkraut, kombucha)
 - Fortification and balancing plant-based meals
4. **Food Literacy and Seasonal Ingredients**
 - Planning menus using seasonal, local produce
 - Introduction to wild herbs and plants growing in the region
 - Designing educational school gardens and herbariums
5. **Reducing Food Waste**
 - Whole-food cooking (using peels, stems, leftovers)
 - Composting and smart kitchen management
 - Educational activities for students
6. **Communication and Innovation in Catering**
 - Promoting plant-based meals in school and public catering
 - Sustainability labeling and menu planning
 - Collaboration with local farmers and suppliers
7. **Trends and Tools**
 - International trends in sustainable gastronomy
 - Digital tools and apps for recipe development and sustainability tracking
 - Exchange programs and international cooperation (Erasmus+, eTwinning)

These modules could be delivered through blended learning formats, including workshops, online seminars, and practical sessions. Implementing such a program would build a new generation of chefs and food educators who are not only skilled in gastronomy, but also responsible stewards of planetary health.



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Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.