Embedding alternative proteins in school food and learning environments

Like a PRO

like-a-pro.eu

Funded by the European Union

cscp

Imprint

Title Embedding alternative proteins in school food and learning environments

Authors Arlind Xhelili
Collaborating Centre on Sustainable Consumption and Production (CSCP)

Project title LIKE-A-PRO. From niche to mainstream – alternative proteins for everybody and everywhere

Citation Xhelili, Arlind (2026). Embedding alternative proteins in school food and learning environments . Wuppertal 2026.

Design soweit / Studio für Übergänge
www.soweit.studio

Funded by
the European Union

This project is funded by the European Union under Grant Agreement No. 101083961.

1. Introduction

Long-term dietary change depends on more than product availability or short-term consumer campaigns. It also depends on familiarity, skills, confidence, social norms, and the ability to understand how food choices relate to health, sustainability, culture, and everyday life. Schools are uniquely positioned to build these foundations. They are not only places where children and young people learn about food; they are also food environments in their own right, where meals are served, preferences are formed, habits are reinforced, and social norms are shaped[1].

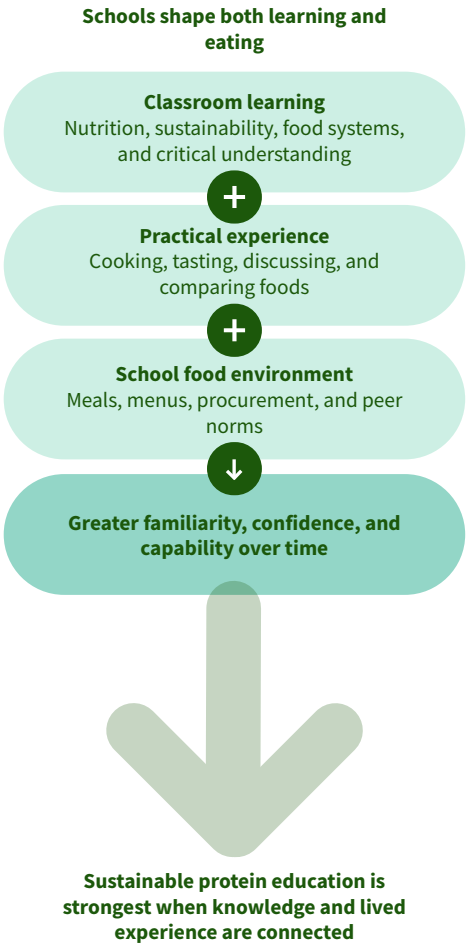
Schools can shape long-term food habits because they combine knowledge, repeated exposure, social experience, and everyday meals.

Alternative proteins (APs) can play a constructive role in this context, but they should not be introduced into schools as a niche topic, an ideological choice, or a simple replacement for conventional proteins. Instead, they should be positioned as part of broader food literacy: understanding different protein sources, learning how diets can support health and sustainability, developing practical cooking skills, and becoming familiar with diverse, affordable, and culturally relevant meals. In this sense, APs are not only products to be consumed, but learning tools that can help connect nutrition, environmental education, food culture, and everyday decision making.

The LIKE-A-PRO findings show that lack of familiarity, limited cooking skills, uncertainty about nutrition, concerns about taste, and low trust can all hinder the uptake of AP products. These barriers are particularly relevant for long-term change because they are not solved only at the point of purchase. If consumers grow up with limited knowledge of protein diversity, little confidence in preparing plant-forward meals, and strong associations between “proper meals” and conventional animal-based proteins, AP products are likely to remain marginal later in life. Schools can help address these barriers early by creating repeated, positive, and age-appropriate encounters with sustainable protein options.

This governance mechanism focuses on how sustainability and health principles can be integrated into school schemes, curricula, and food provision. It considers both the educational side of schools, including curricula, classroom activities, cooking skills, and food literacy, and the food environment side, including school meals, procurement, tasting opportunities, and communication with families. These two dimensions should not be treated separately. Classroom learning becomes more meaningful when students encounter related foods in the canteen, and school meals become more acceptable when students understand what they are eating and why it matters.

1 OECD. (2024). Food for thought: School meals for sustainable societies. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/629a2730-en



The specific contribution of this governance mechanism is to position APs as enablers of long-term change. Unlike mechanisms focused on immediate consumer choice, marketing, labelling, or procurement, this framework looks at how young people can develop the knowledge, skills, openness, and confidence needed to engage with more sustainable diets over time. The aim is not to prescribe a uniform diet for schools, but to create learning and food environments where sustainable protein choices are understandable, normal, nutritious, enjoyable, and socially accepted.

2. What is in this governance mechanism?

This governance mechanism provides a framework for integrating sustainability and health principles into school schemes and curricula, with APs serving as a practical entry point. It is intended for education authorities, school leaders, curriculum developers, teachers, municipalities, school caterers, public procurement authorities, health educators, sustainability educators, civil society organisations, and researchers working on food education and school food provision.

The document focuses on how schools can support long-term familiarity with sustainable proteins through both learning and lived experience. It considers how APs can be introduced in classrooms, school meals, cooking activities, sustainability education, health education, and community engagement. It also addresses the conditions needed for school-based AP integration to be accepted, including age-appropriate communication, nutritional quality, cultural sensitivity, allergen management, affordability, staff training, and transparent engagement with parents and caregivers.

The mechanism covers five main areas. First, it explains why schools are important settings for long-term food system change. Second, it outlines how the recommendations were developed, drawing on LIKE-A-PRO consumer insights, behavioural pilots, and stakeholder recommendations. Third, it proposes a framework for integrating APs into school curricula and school food schemes. Fourth, it suggests an implementation pathway that connects policy, curriculum development, procurement, teacher training, school meals, and family engagement. Finally, it provides a distilled summary and practice-oriented indicators for monitoring progress.

The mechanism does not assume that all schools should introduce APs in the same way. Age groups, national curricula, school meal systems, cultural food traditions, procurement structures, and local capacities vary widely. Instead, it proposes a flexible framework that can be adapted across contexts. Its central message is that APs should be introduced as part of a broader learning journey around healthy, sustainable, diverse, and enjoyable food.

3. How was this governance mechanism developed?

The recommendations were developed by bringing together evidence from several LIKE-A-PRO activities. The Living Labs across 11 European countries[2] provided insight into consumer perceptions of AP products, including what supports acceptance and what creates resistance. These findings were organised through the COM-B model[3], which understands behaviour as the result of capability, opportunity, and motivation, and through the Consumer Choice Framework[4], which distinguishes between interventions that alter choice options, expand choice, shape the choice environment, or influence behaviour beyond the immediate point of purchase.

The Living Labs showed that education and familiarity are important enablers of AP uptake. Consumers were more likely to consider APs when they had knowledge of the products, understood their nutritional value, knew how to prepare them, and had previous positive experiences. Early introduction through schools and kindergartens, educational campaigns, cooking skills, recipes, and canteen inspiration were identified as ways to increase familiarity and confidence. At the same time, lack of knowledge, uncertainty about nutrition, limited cooking skills, and unfamiliarity were repeatedly identified as barriers.

The findings also show that schools matter beyond knowledge provision. Food is social and cultural. Children and young people learn not only from formal lessons, but also from what is served, what peers eat, how adults talk about food, and whether new foods are presented positively or as obligations. This means that school-based AP integration should combine education, tasting, meal provision, and social normalisation. It should not rely only on classroom information.

The behavioural pilots[5] reinforce this point. The choice-editing and choice-expansion pilots showed that food environments influence behaviour, but also that acceptability depends on product appeal, communication, perceived autonomy, and

2 Xhelili, A., Wiegard, J., & Schüürmann, J. (2025). LIKE-A-PRO's Living Labs. Consumer Insights Dataset. LIKE-A-PRO project. Wuppertal, 2025.

3 Michie, S., van Stralen, M. M., & West, R. (2011). The behaviour change wheel: A new method for characterizing and designing behaviour change interventions. Implementation Science, 6(1), 42. https://doi.org/10.1186/1748-5908-6-42

4 Xhelili, A., & Nicolau, M. (2021). From intention to action: Multi-stakeholder recommendations for making sustainable food consumption a reality. Wuppertal. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5337036

5 Xhelili, A., Schüürmann, J., Strube, R., Ziavras, S., Perrea, T., Chrysochou, P., Nystrand, B., Bye, I., Nystad, R., Vázquez-Araújo, L., Romeo-Arroyo, E., Vertriest, L., Willems, M., van der Waard, S. (2026). Driving Change with LIKE-A-PRO: Results and Lessons from Behavioural Intervention Pilots. LIKE-A-PRO project. Wuppertal, 2026.

gradual exposure. These lessons are especially important for schools, where changes to meals can affect children, parents, teachers, caterers, and public authorities. Introducing APs into school settings should therefore be gradual, transparent, and supported by positive experiences rather than framed as restriction.

The stakeholder briefs[6] provide further support. The policy-maker brief emphasises education and training, accessibility, innovation, labelling, and monitoring. The academia brief highlights the role of universities and educational institutions in public awareness, curriculum diversification, participatory research, and student engagement. The civil society brief stresses consumer engagement, evidence-based information, myth-busting, and partnerships. Together, these sources suggest that schools can act as long-term capability-building environments for sustainable protein transitions.

The specific contribution of this mechanism is to translate these insights into a school-focused framework that connects curriculum, canteen, procurement, and community engagement.

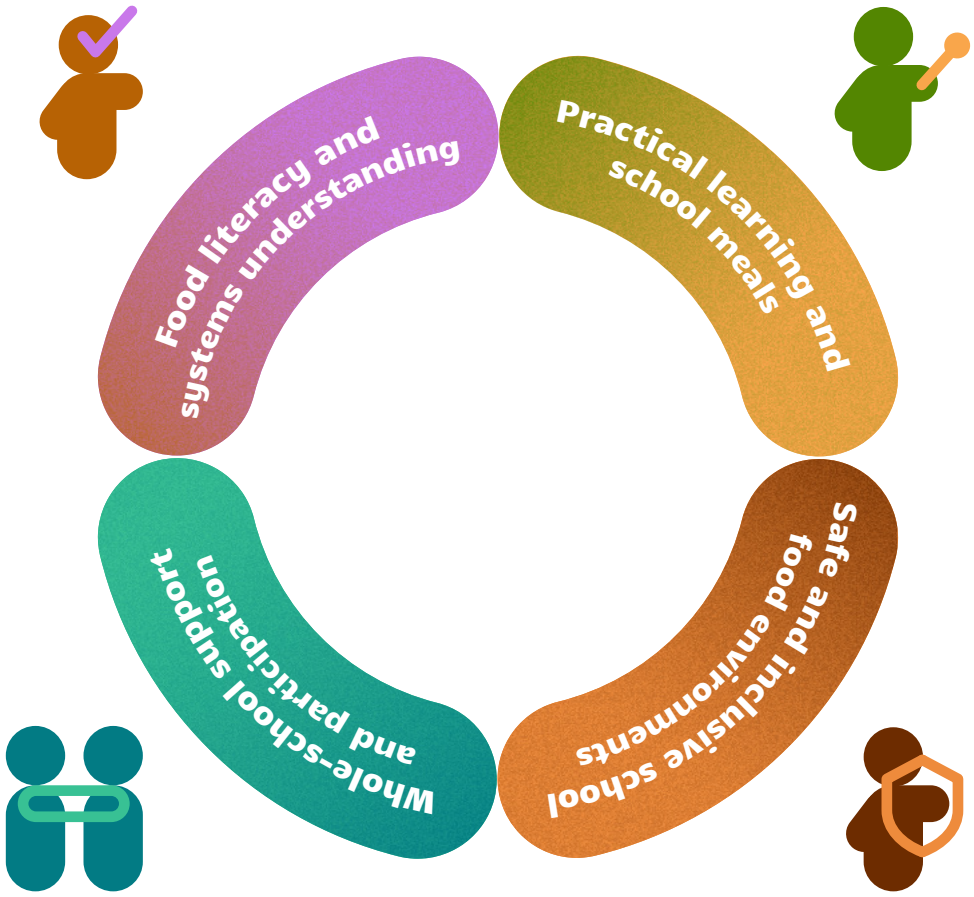
6 Xhelili et al. (2024) Acceptance of Alternative Proteins Among European Consumers. Policymaker, Industry, CSOs and Academia Briefs.

4. Framework for integrating APs into school schemes and curricula

Integrating APs into school curricula

- Help students understand sustainable protein choices
- Teach protein diversity and balanced diets
- Connect APs to health, sustainability, food culture, and responsible consumption
- Use existing subjects such as biology, geography, home economics, citizenship, and food literacy

- Turn curriculum content into lived experience
- Use cooking, tasting, label reading, ingredient comparison, and recipe work
- Link lessons with school meals, menu themes, tastings, and ingredient stories
- Introduce APs gradually through familiar dishes and repeated exposure



- Make implementation shared and sustainable
- Support teachers, caterers, school leaders, and local partners with training and materials
- Involve students through taste panels, food councils, co-creation, projects, and feedback
- Monitor both learning outcomes and food outcomes over time

- Build trust around AP-related learning and meals
- Ensure nutritional quality, affordability, and cultural relevance
- Provide clear allergen information and suitable alternatives
- Use age-appropriate materials and transparent communication with parents

4.1 Integrate protein diversity into food literacy education

The starting point should be food literacy. Students should learn what proteins are, why they matter for health, and how different protein sources can contribute to balanced diets. This should include conventional protein sources as well as legumes, beans, peas, lentils, mushrooms, seeds, nuts, fermented ingredients, and other alternative or emerging protein sources where age-appropriate.

APs should not be presented as a single category that replaces everything else. Instead, they should be introduced as part of dietary diversity. This helps avoid polarisation and supports a more balanced understanding of food systems. Students can learn that different protein sources have different nutritional profiles, cultural meanings, preparation methods, environmental impacts, and roles in meals.

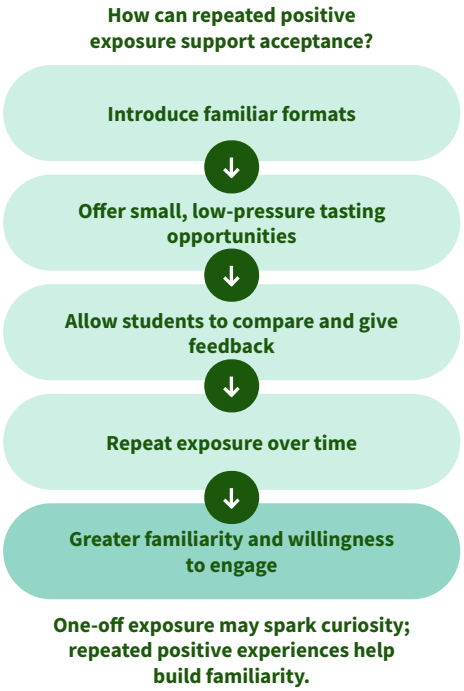
For younger children, this may involve simple activities about different foods, colours, textures, and where ingredients come from. For older students, it can include more detailed discussions on nutrition, sustainability, food systems, climate, biodiversity, agriculture, innovation, and consumer behaviour. The key is to make APs understandable and relevant, not abstract or technical.

A food literacy approach also helps address misinformation. Students can learn how to read basic food information, ask questions about ingredients, understand allergens, and distinguish between evidence-based claims and marketing claims. These skills support not only AP uptake, but broader healthy and sustainable food choices.

4.2 Connect classroom learning with school meals

Learning about sustainable proteins is more powerful when it is connected to what students actually eat. If students hear about legumes, peas, mushrooms, or plant-forward meals in the classroom but never encounter them in the canteen, the learning remains abstract. Conversely, if school meals change without explanation, students may resist unfamiliar dishes.

Schools should therefore connect classroom learning with school food provision. This can be done through themed meal days, tasting sessions, classroom-canteen

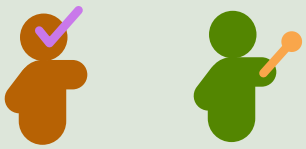


projects, menu explanations, student feedback activities, or lessons linked to ingredients used in school meals. For example, a lesson on protein diversity can be followed by a tasting of bean-based spreads, lentil pasta sauce, mushroom dishes, or pea-protein options. A lesson on sustainability can be linked to a school lunch that highlights seasonal, plant-forward ingredients.

This connection should be designed carefully. Students should not feel that they are being tested or forced to accept a particular food. Instead, the aim is to make new foods familiar and understandable. Tasting portions, choice within the meal offer, and opportunities to give feedback can help maintain a sense of agency.

School meals can also be used as learning tools. Menus can include simple explanations of ingredients, nutrition, or sustainability. Digital school meal platforms can provide short educational notes. Posters or classroom materials can connect meals to broader topics, such as farming, biodiversity, food waste, or health.

4.3 Build practical cooking skills and confidence



Familiarity grows when students not only learn about sustainable proteins, but also gain confidence preparing and tasting them.

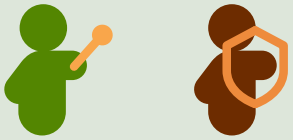
One of the recurring barriers to AP uptake is lack of cooking skills. Consumers may not know how to prepare AP ingredients, how to season them, how to combine them with familiar foods, or how to make them appealing. Schools can address this barrier by giving students, from earlier age, practical experience.

Cooking education should include accessible AP ingredients such as lentils, beans, peas, chickpeas, mushrooms, tofu, tempeh, seeds, and other locally relevant options. The focus should be on simple, tasty, affordable, and familiar meals. Students can learn how to prepare soups, wraps, pasta sauces, spreads, stews, salads, burgers, bowls, and snacks using diverse protein sources.

Practical cooking activities should also teach texture, seasoning, storage, food safety, and reducing waste. These skills are important because negative first experiences can create long-lasting resistance. If students learn how to make AP meals taste good, they are more likely to view them positively.

Where schools do not have full kitchen facilities, cooking confidence can still be built through demonstrations, tasting workshops, recipe cards, video materials, after-school activities, or partnerships with local chefs, caterers, parents, or community organisations. The aim is not to turn every school into a culinary institution, but to ensure that food education includes practical experience.

4.4 Introduce APs gradually through repeated positive exposure



New foods often require repeated exposure before they are accepted, especially among children. A one-off tasting event may create curiosity, but it is unlikely to change preferences on its own. AP integration should therefore be gradual and repeated.

Schools can begin with familiar formats. Plant-forward pasta sauces, bean spreads, lentil soups, chickpea wraps, mushroom dishes, or mixed meals may be easier to accept than unfamiliar products introduced without context. Over time, schools can introduce a wider variety of AP ingredients and dishes.

Repeated exposure should be positive. Students should be encouraged to taste, compare, describe, and discuss foods without pressure. They should be allowed to express preferences and participate in improving recipes. This can turn tasting into a learning process rather than a compliance exercise.

Gradual exposure also supports parents and caregivers. Sudden changes to school meals may generate concern, especially if families are uncertain about nutrition, allergens, or cultural fit. Clear communication and incremental introduction can reduce resistance.

4.5 Ensure nutritional quality, safety, and dietary inclusion

School food must meet high standards for nutrition and safety. Any integration of APs into school meals should therefore be guided by nutritional adequacy, age-appropriate needs, allergen management, and dietary inclusion.

AP-based meals should provide sufficient protein and contribute to balanced diets. They should also consider fibre, salt, saturated fat, iron, vitamin B12 where relevant, and overall meal composition. This is particularly important because some consumers worry that APs may be nutritionally inadequate. School meal standards can help build confidence by ensuring that AP dishes are not only sustainable, but also healthy and appropriate for children and young people.

Nutritional quality, allergen safety, and dietary inclusion must remain central to any school-based introduction of alternative proteins.

Allergens require careful attention. Some AP ingredients are based on soy, gluten, nuts, legumes, or other potential allergens. Schools must provide clear information and suitable alternatives. Staff should be trained to manage allergen risks and communicate with parents and caregivers.

Dietary inclusion also matters. School meals should respect cultural, religious, medical, and personal dietary needs. APs can sometimes support inclusion, for example by providing options that work across different dietary preferences. However, this requires careful planning and clear communication.

4.6 Support teachers, school caterers, and school leaders

Successful integration depends on the adults who design, teach, cook, serve, and communicate school food. Teachers may need age-appropriate materials. Caterers may need recipes, procurement guidance, and training. School leaders may need support to align food education, school meals, sustainability goals, and parent communication.

Teachers should be provided with practical teaching resources that connect APs to existing curriculum areas, such as biology, geography, health education, sustainability, home economics, citizenship education, or food technology. Materials should be adaptable by age group and should avoid presenting APs as a political or moral obligation.

Caterers should receive practical training on AP ingredients, recipe development, taste, texture, portion planning, allergen management, and student feedback. School meal providers should not be expected to introduce AP dishes without support, especially where budgets, staffing, or kitchen facilities are limited.

School leaders can help by creating coherence. If APs are introduced in meals but not discussed in lessons, or discussed in lessons but not served in the canteen, opportunities are missed. Leadership is needed to connect curriculum, procurement, catering, sustainability plans, and communication with families.

4.7 Engage parents, caregivers, and communities

Parents and caregivers play a central role in shaping children's food habits and perceptions. If they do not understand why APs are being introduced, they may worry about nutrition, safety, cost, or cultural relevance. Transparent and respectful communication is therefore essential.

Schools should explain the purpose of introducing sustainable protein options, the nutritional standards applied, the ingredients used, and how allergens and dietary needs are managed. Communication should avoid suggesting that families are being told how to eat. Instead, it can frame APs as part of food education, dietary diversity, and practical skills for a changing food system.

Align the parts of the school food system

- Curriculum +
- School meals +
- Teacher and caterer capacity +
- Family and community engagement +
- Coherent school-based food learning

AP integration is more credible when what students learn, eat, and experience points in the same direction.

Parent engagement can include recipe cards, tasting events, school food days, newsletters, information evenings, or digital meal platforms. Community partnerships can also help. Local producers, chefs, health professionals, civil society organ-

isations, and universities can support learning activities, tastings, or educational materials.

Engaging communities also helps adapt AP integration to local food cultures. Students are more likely to accept sustainable protein meals when they connect to familiar flavours, local ingredients, and family food practices.

4.8 Align school schemes, procurement, and curricula

School-based AP integration will be more effective if it is supported by policy and procurement systems. Curricula can introduce food literacy and sustainability principles, but school meals must also make these principles visible in practice. Similarly, procurement can bring AP meals into schools, but students need education and positive exposure to understand and accept them.

Education authorities, municipalities, and school food providers should therefore align school schemes, procurement criteria, and curriculum objectives. School food standards can include sustainable protein goals. Procurement criteria can require nutritious, appealing, and affordable AP options. Curricula can include food system sustainability, nutrition, and cooking skills. School schemes can support tasting, fruit and vegetable programmes, food literacy activities, and sustainable meal provision.

This alignment should be gradual and flexible. Schools vary in capacity, and some may need additional funding, training, or infrastructure. Policy should therefore provide direction and support rather than simply adding expectations.

4.9 Use schools as sites for participatory learning and innovation

Students should not only be passive recipients of new food messages or meals. They can be involved in shaping school food environments. Participatory approaches can increase ownership, reduce resistance, and generate useful feedback.

Schools can involve students in taste panels, menu co-creation, recipe competitions, food councils, sustainability projects, or school garden activities. Older students can conduct surveys, analyse food waste, compare protein sources, or design communication materials for peers. These activities connect APs to practical learning and make food system change more tangible.

Participatory approaches can also support innovation. Students may identify why a dish is not accepted, suggest improvements, or help develop more appealing names and formats. Caterers and teachers can then use this feedback to adapt meals and lessons.

Students are more likely to engage when they can taste, evaluate, and help improve the food environment rather than simply receive new meals or messages.

Participation should be meaningful. If students are asked for feedback, they should see how their input is used. This helps build trust and demonstrates that sustainable food transitions can be collaborative.

4.10 Monitor both learning outcomes and food outcomes

School-based AP integration should be evaluated through both educational and food-service indicators. It is not enough to know that APs were mentioned in a lesson or placed on a menu. Schools should assess whether students become more familiar with diverse protein sources, whether they are willing to try AP meals, whether meals are accepted, and whether food waste changes.

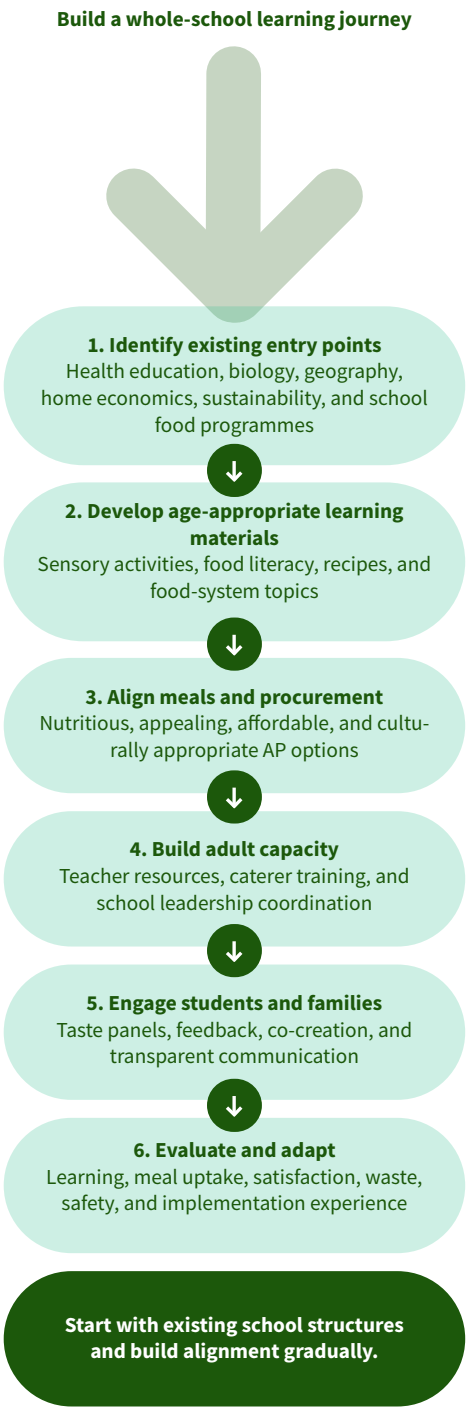
Learning indicators can include student knowledge, cooking confidence, understanding of sustainability and health links, and ability to identify different protein sources. Food indicators can include meal uptake, plate waste, satisfaction, repeat selection, allergen compliance, and parent feedback.

Monitoring should be proportionate. Schools should not be overburdened with complex reporting. Simple surveys, tasting feedback, menu data, plate waste checks, teacher reflections, and caterer feedback can provide useful insights.

Evaluation should be used for improvement, not only accountability. If students reject a dish, the response should not be to abandon AP integration entirely. It may mean the recipe needs improvement, the introduction was too abrupt, the communication was unclear, or the dish did not fit local preferences.

5. Suggested implementation pathway

A realistic pathway for integrating APs into schools should begin from the idea that schools are learning environments and food environments at the same time. APs should not be added only as a lesson topic or only as a canteen item. The strongest approach is to connect curriculum, meals, procurement, teacher and caterer capacity, and family engagement so that students encounter sustainable protein choices in coherent and age-appropriate ways.



The first task is to identify existing entry points. Many education systems already include relevant themes in health education, biology, geography, home economics, citizenship, environmental education, or school food programmes. APs can be introduced through these existing channels rather than as a separate or additional topic. This helps reduce curriculum burden and positions sustainable protein choices within broader food literacy, health, sustainability, and culture.

Learning materials should then be developed in age-appropriate ways. Younger children may benefit from playful, sensory, and hands-on activities, while older students can engage with nutrition, food systems, climate, biodiversity, agriculture, innovation, and consumer behaviour. Materials should include practical activities, recipes, tasting guidance, and links to school meals where possible. The aim is to build understanding and curiosity without presenting APs as an obligation.

School meals and procurement should be aligned with the learning process. Municipalities and school food providers can identify where AP meals can be introduced gradually, affordably, safely, and in familiar formats. Procurement criteria should support nutritious, appealing, and culturally appropriate AP dishes. Repeated exposure through meals, tastings, and menu explanations can help students connect what they learn with what they eat.

Adults in the school system need support to make this connection work. Teachers need confidence and materials to discuss APs as part of health and sustainability education. Caterers need training to prepare AP meals that students will actually eat. School leaders need to coordinate curriculum, procurement, catering, sustainability plans, and communication with families. Joint training can help avoid a situation where classroom learning and school meals move in separate directions.

Parent and student engagement should be built into the process from the beginning. Families need clear information about nutrition, allergens, safety, cultural

relevance, and the purpose of introducing AP options. Students should be involved through taste panels, menu feedback, co-creation activities, food councils, or school projects. Participation helps reduce resistance because students and families can see that AP integration is a learning process, not a top-down instruction.

Evaluation should cover both learning and food outcomes. Schools and municipalities can monitor student knowledge, cooking confidence, meal uptake, satisfaction, food waste, parent feedback, teacher reflections, and caterer experience. Results should be used to refine recipes, teaching materials, procurement criteria, and communication. The aim is not to judge schools, but to learn what makes AP integration acceptable, educationally useful, nutritionally sound, and practically feasible.

Within this pathway, education authorities and municipalities provide the enabling framework. Schools translate the framework into learning and daily practice. Caterers and procurement teams ensure that meals are nutritious, affordable, and feasible. Teachers connect APs to learning goals. Parents and caregivers support trust and continuity beyond school. Students provide feedback and participate in shaping the school food environment. Researchers and civil society organisations can support evaluation, materials, and community engagement.

6. Distilled summary and practice-oriented indicators

This governance mechanism proposes a framework for integrating sustainability and health principles into school schemes and curricula, using APs as practical enablers of long-term food system change. Its central idea is that schools can build familiarity, skills, confidence, and social normalisation over time by connecting food education with school meals and lived experience.

In practical terms, the framework should be organised around a whole-school learning journey. Students should first encounter protein diversity as part of food literacy, then see those ideas reflected in school meals, tastings, and practical cooking activities. APs should be introduced gradually and positively, with nutrition, safety, and dietary inclusion treated as non-negotiable conditions. Teachers, caterers, parents, and students should be involved as co-enablers of the process, so that AP integration becomes part of everyday school life rather than a one-off lesson or menu change.

Practice-oriented indicators for integrating sustainable protein education into school schemes and curricula

CURRICULA INTEGRATION OBJECTIVE	PRACTICAL INDICATOR	WHY IT MATTERS
Build food literacy	Share of students who can identify different protein sources and explain their role in a balanced diet	Measures whether students understand protein diversity
Connect health and sustainability	Student understanding of how food choices relate to health, environment, and food systems	Shows whether APs are linked to broader learning goals
Connect classroom and canteen	Number of lessons linked to school meal activities, tastings, menu explanations, or ingredient themes	Tracks whether learning and food provision reinforce each other
Increase familiarity	Number of AP ingredients or dishes introduced through lessons, tastings, or school meals	Tracks repeated exposure
Support repeated exposure	Frequency of AP or plant-forward meals, tastings, or ingredient activities across the school year	Helps APs become familiar rather than one-off novelties
Build cooking confidence	Share of students reporting confidence preparing simple meals with legumes, beans, peas, mushrooms, or other AP ingredients	Measures practical capability
Support meal uptake	Share of students selecting AP or plant-forward meals when offered	Tracks food environment outcomes
Monitor acceptability	Student satisfaction ratings for AP meals	Helps improve recipes and presentation
Reduce waste	Plate waste from AP meals compared with other meals	Indicates whether meals are actually eaten
Ensure nutrition	Share of AP meals meeting school nutrition standards	Protects health and credibility
Manage safety	Allergen information and suitable alternatives available for AP meals	Supports inclusion and trust
Engage parents	Parent awareness of why and how APs are introduced in school meals and lessons	Reduces misunderstanding and resistance
Support teachers	Number of teachers using AP-related food literacy or sustainability materials	Tracks curriculum integration
Ensure age-appropriate learning	Availability of AP-related materials adapted for different age groups	Ensures content is understandable and relevant for students at different stages
Support caterers	Number of caterers trained in AP meal preparation and student feedback use	Measures implementation capacity
Encourage participation	Number of student feedback, taste panel, or co-creation activities	Shows whether students are involved
Align policy and practice	Inclusion of sustainable protein objectives in school food strategies, curricula, or procurement criteria	Indicates whether integration is embedded rather than one-off

7. Conclusion and way forward

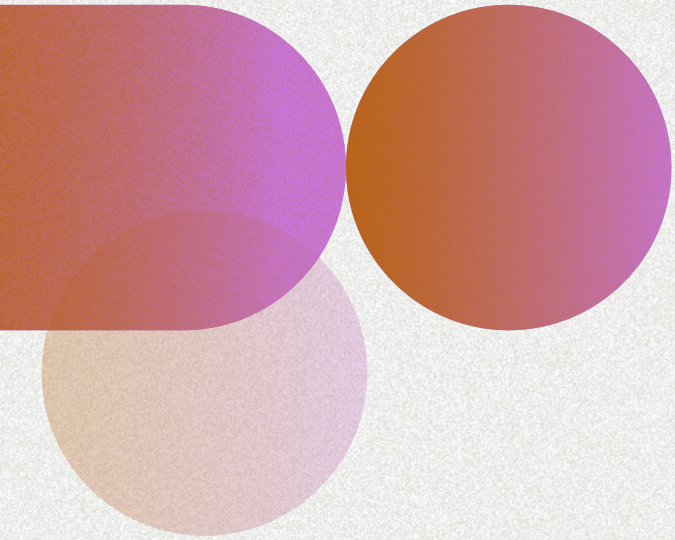
Schools can play a central role in long-term food system change because they combine learning, meals, social experience, and habit formation. Integrating APs into school schemes and curricula is therefore not only about adding new products to menus. It is about building the knowledge, skills, familiarity, and confidence that enable young people to engage with healthier and more sustainable diets over time.

The way forward is to connect classroom learning with food practice. Students should learn about protein diversity, nutrition, sustainability, and food culture, while also having opportunities to taste, prepare, discuss, and evaluate AP meals. School meals should be nutritionally sound, appealing, affordable, safe, and introduced gradually. Teachers, caterers, parents, and students all need to be part of the process.

This mechanism's specific contribution is to position APs as enablers of long-term change. They can help make sustainability and health principles tangible, turning abstract food system goals into everyday learning and eating experiences. At the same time, schools should avoid presenting APs as ideological or mandatory replacements. The focus should be on diversity, skills, confidence, and informed choice.

Long-term change is more likely when classroom learning, school meals, practical skills, and family engagement reinforce one another.

A realistic way forward is to begin with existing curriculum and school food entry points, develop age-appropriate materials, introduce AP meals gradually, train teachers and caterers, engage families, and evaluate both learning and food outcomes. In this way, schools can help normalise sustainable protein choices not through pressure, but through familiarity, participation, and positive experience.



Like a PRO

like-a-pro.eu

Funded by
the European Union

cscp