



EDUCATIONAL SYNERGIES BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND AGRI-FOOD COMPANIES IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE



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Table Of Content

01.

Introduction

02.

Why education +
agri-food company
collaboration
matters

03.

Key Areas of
Educational-AgriFood
Collaboration

04.

Enablers &
Success Factors

05.

Challenges &
Barriers

06.

Practical
recommendations
for Schools &
Agri-Food
Companies

07.

Implications for
Climate Change &
Food Systems

08.

Conclusion

1. INTRODUCTION



Brief context:

- **The agri-food system is both a major contributor to climate change (e.g., via greenhouse gases, land use, deforestation, water use) and severely affected by it (e.g., through droughts, pests, yield losses).**
- **Therefore, transition to more climate-smart, resilient food systems is essential.**
- **Schools (and other educational institutions) and agri-food companies each have roles to play – and synergies between them can amplify impact.**
- **Purpose of the report: to explore how schools + agri-food companies can collaborate (educationally) to support climate change mitigation and adaptation in food systems.**

2. Why education + agri-food company collaboration matters



2.1. Education side

- Schools reach young people who will become the next generation of consumers, citizens, workers, entrepreneurs.
- Embedding climate-smart food/agriculture knowledge, attitudes and skills early can shift behaviours and choices (both consumption and production).
- Also, education can provide talent and workforce preparation for the transforming agri-food sector (digital skills, sustainability skills, systems thinking).
- Example from Latvia, the project Environmental Innovators in Latvia engage secondary school students in research projects around the agri-food system: waste, climate, biodiversity, land-use, cooperating with international partners in the frame of Erasmus+ project “MiniEduAgri: Comics and Interactive Games for Explaining the Farm to Fork Strategy to Primary School Students”



2. Why education + agri-food company collaboration matters



2.2. Agri-food company / business side

- These companies are both part of the problem and part of the solution: they can reduce emissions, redesign supply chains, innovate on product- and process-level, adopt regenerative/agroecological practices.
- But they also need a workforce, new ideas, stronger connections with society, and public acceptance/support for the changes.
- Bridging to education helps: companies can help provide real-world learning, internships, project-based work, co-design curricula, and benefit from fresh student ideas.



2. Why education + agri-food company collaboration matters



2.3. Synergies and benefits

- **By collaborating, schools and agri-food companies can co-create learning that is rooted in real industry challenges (so students gain relevant skills) and co-create innovation/awareness for companies (fresh perspectives, engagement with youth).**
- **It promotes “systems thinking”: connecting food production, consumption, climate, sustainability.**
- **Builds social legitimacy for companies (engaging with education, community).**
- **Helps prepare the workforce and society for the green transition in food systems.**

3. Key Areas of Educational-AgriFood Collaboration

Specific areas where synergies can be leveraged.



Curriculum & Skills development

01

Schools working with agri-food companies to co-design modules on climate-smart agriculture, sustainable food systems, circular economy in food, digitalisation in agriculture.

02

Vocational education/training (VET) linking directly to agri-food business needs (e.g., precision farming, agro-ecology, data management). For example, the EU Skills Academies bring industry, training providers and education institutions together for the agri-food sector.

03

Guest lectures, field visits, company-led workshops in schools.



3. Key Areas of Educational-AgriFood Collaboration

Specific areas where synergies can be leveraged.



Project-based learning and student engagement

Schools run projects (in partnership with companies) where students investigate and propose solutions to real company or community challenges (e.g., reducing food waste, optimising supply chains, local sourcing, carbon footprints).



Example 1: School Milk & Fruit Programme in Latvia



Movement Goal

A national programme in Latvia whereby children in many educational institutions received milk, fruit and vegetables several times per week. ☒ This programme links schools (education context) with the agri/food supply chain (milk, fruit, vegetables).

The programme also includes an element of planting/delivering planting boxes (spring update: e.g., “Children receive planting sets – this year will grow dill and lettuce”).

<https://piensaugliskolai.lv/lv>

Example 2: School Food Forum in Daugavpils, Latvia



Movement Goal

On 13-14 May 2025 the Forum brought together more than 80 participants (educators, policy makers, procurement specialists, local producers) at Latgale Industrial Technical School in Daugavpils, Latvia. The main focus: “food education in schools for food waste reduction & prevention”, and sustainable/green food procurement.

<https://interreg-baltic.eu/event/daugavpils-school-food-forum/>

Example 3: MiniEduAgri: Comics and Interactive Games for Explaining the Farm to Fork Strategy to Primary School Students



<https://minieduagri.eu/about>

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MiniEduAgri is an Erasmus+ Small-Scale Partnership project aimed at fostering environmental awareness, sustainability, and STEM interest among primary school students. The project combines creative educational tools like comics and mini-games with a robust methodology to educate children aged 6–10 on the European Green Deal, Farm to Fork strategies, and rural development. By incorporating gamification and storytelling, MiniEduAgri promotes pro-environmental behaviors, healthy food habits, and food technology awareness while building teachers' capacity to engage students with innovative methods.



4. Enablers & Success Factors

Key factors that support successful synergy between schools and agri-food companies:

- **Shared vision & commitment:** both schools and companies need to see climate change + sustainable food systems as part of their mission.
- **Mutual relevance:** educational content needs to align with company real-world challenges; companies gain value from fresh ideas, talent pipeline, positive image.
- **Curriculum integration:** Sustainability and food system content needs to be integrated into school curricula (not just one-off events).
- **Hands-on / real-world experience:** site visits, company-led projects, field work in agri-food environment.
- **Skills focus:** Technical (e.g., precision agriculture, digitalisation), soft (adaptability, systems thinking), sustainability literacy.
- **Partnership infrastructure:** formalised partnerships/alliances between schools, companies, research institutions. Example: EU Skills Academies.
- **Local adaptation:** recognising that practices must reflect local agro-ecosystems, climate conditions, socio-economic contexts.
 - **Community & policy support:** Successful models like Copenhagen's school food model show how institutional food policy + education + procurement practices align.
 - **Resources:** Time, funding, training for teachers, company staff participation, digital tools.
 - **Monitoring & evaluation:** Track outcomes (student learning, behaviour change, company innovation outcomes, climate/ sustainability impact).





5. Challenges & Barriers

- **Skills gaps:** both in schools (teachers may lack sustainability/food system expertise) and in companies (lack of people with green/digital/agro-ecology skills).
- **Fragmentation:** Many initiatives but lacking coordination/networks; infrastructure and old systems can block progress.
- **Curriculum inertia:** Education systems may be slow to integrate new themes like sustainable food systems/climate into curricula.
- **Business constraints:** Companies might prioritise short-term returns, lack resources to engage in education partnerships, or struggle to align with school schedules.
- **Measurement difficulty:** Hard to measure the direct impact of educational synergies on climate or food system outcomes.
- **Uneven local contexts:** What works in one country/region may not in another (climate, culture, agri-food system, education system).
- **Resource constraints:** Schools may lack access to field sites, visits, company linkages; companies may lack capacity/time for educational outreach.
- **Engagement & motivation:** Students and companies both need motivation and incentives to engage meaningfully.



6. Practical recommendations for Schools & Agri-Food Companies



For Schools

Identify and map local/regional agri-food companies (farmers, processors, food retailers) and build partnerships for visits, guest talks, mentorship.



For Schools

Integrate modules on sustainable food systems, climate-smart agriculture, circular food economy into existing curricula (science, geography, economics, vocational subjects).



For Schools

Use project-based learning: challenge students to work with local companies on a real sustainability issue (food waste, sourcing, carbon footprint, packaging, alternative proteins).



For Schools

Provide teacher professional development in food-system climate literacy, and facilitate collaboration with industry.



For Schools

Facilitate student linkages to internships/apprenticeships in agri-food sustainability roles.



For Schools

Engage community: families, local businesses, local government – to reinforce sustainable food choices, procurement, food waste reduction.



For Agri-Food Companies

- Partner with schools to contribute real-world case studies, host visits, offer apprenticeships or mentoring.
- Co-design educational challenges: Invite students to solve a business-relevant sustainability problem (e.g., reduce food waste, optimise supply chain emissions, design sustainable packaging).
- Provide learning resources or funding for educational programmes focused on sustainable food/climate.
- Work with educational institutions to inform them of the skills you need in future workforce (digital, sustainability, agro-ecology) and help shape curriculum/training.
- Participate in “living labs” or pilot projects with students/academia to test new sustainable practices and engage next generation.
- Use the partnership for company-value: staff development, innovation generation, employee motivation, community engagement.
- Ensure that company commitments (e.g., to decarbonisation, circular economy) are visible and aligned with educational messages (so authenticity is maintained).



For Joint Action

- **Define clear roles, goals and metrics for the partnership (for example: number of students, case studies produced, reduction in food waste, pilot practice implemented).**
- **Develop sustainable funding / resource model (teacher release time, company staff involvement, field visits, materials).**
- **Create networks of schools + companies + research institutions to share best practice, scale initiatives, avoid duplication.**
- **Ensure inclusion of local context: tailor the collaboration to regional agro-ecosystem, climate risk, company size/type, student age/level.**
- **Encourage recognition and reward (certificates, showcases, peer events) for student/teacher contributions and company participation.**
- **Leverage digital tools: online platforms for sharing resources, data dashboards for company-school projects, gamification to engage students (see research on IoT/gamification for sustainability).**

7. Implications for Climate Change & Food Systems





Implications for Climate Change & Food Systems

- These educational synergies help build capacity (skills, knowledge) in the agri-food system for climate adaptation (e.g., new crops, drought resilient systems) and mitigation (reducing emissions, circularity).
- They help shift behaviour: both future producers (students) and consumers – the next generation will make food-system choices with climate awareness.
- They help drive innovation: students engaged with real business challenges may generate fresh ideas, companies get access to talent and fresh perspectives.
- They help foster systems approach: by linking education, business, community, research, you move beyond siloed actions to integrated food-climate-education interventions.
- Ultimately this supports achieving broader targets: a climate-neutral food chain and more resilient, sustainable food systems in the face of climate change.

8. CONCLUSION



To meet the massive challenge of climate change and its impact on food systems, we cannot rely on companies or schools alone. When schools and agri-food companies join force - educational programmes rooted in the realities of the food system, accompanied by company engagement, innovation and workforce development - then you get multiplier effects: better educated youth, more sustainable practices in the food chain, stronger innovation, broader societal engagement. The synergies outlined in this report provide a roadmap for how to operationalise this collaboration and thereby contribute meaningfully to both climate and food system goals.





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