In 2015, Bruges joined the EUROPEAN FOOD SMART CITIES project and began co-creating a sustainable food strategy with its citizens. Approved in 2015, Bruges’ sustainable food strategy, Bruggermaak, cuts across several themes, from curbing food waste to promoting Fairtrade and a shift to less and better meat consumption. The Brugse Smaakt strategy is integral to the city’s aim to be carbon neutral by 2050 and is supported by the Flemish Government’s “Zwanger over Morgen” (“Expectant for tomorrow”) policy. This was also the start of the Bruges Food Lab, a policy and project innovation space that brings together people from across the city to tackle food issues. In Bruges, co-creating with citizens has been critical for the successful integration of food and climate targets.

ENSABLING CO-CREATION: KEY TO INTEGRATED FOOD POLICIES AND CITIZEN BUY-IN

The Bruges Food Lab was initially led by a steering group of representatives from the City Council, civil society, research institutions, and farmers. From March 2017, the City hired a full-time coordinator for the Food Lab to expand its capacity. The Food Lab coordinator works closely with the City’s Food Policy Coordinator and oversees the participatory work of the organization. While the City coordinator ensures that the relevant departments are involved across FOOD AND CLIMATE ACTIONS, this inclusive and dual-city-locality model ensures greater ownership, a more effective representation of the Brugse Smaakt. Within the Food Lab staff, members work on different themes through action groups, and its overall MEMBERSHIP is purposely diverse. It includes farmers from around the city, representatives from high schools, universities and knowledge institutes, the restaurant and food sector, NGOs, community organizations, and interested residents and sustainable food advocates. This diversity allows the Food Lab to design policies with buy-in from local residents. For example, having both farmers and vegan advocates around the table is key to a compromise on The Strategy’s aim for 60% plant-based foods. Going forward, Bruges hopes to solidify this leadership by serving climate-friendly meals to by example by serving 60% plant-based foods. Going forward, Bruges hopes to solidify this leadership by serving climate-friendly meals to.

GETTING EVERYONE AROUND THE TABLE

The City of Bruges is taking steps towards implementing the Brugse Smaakt strategy aims to inspire these actors to be drivers of a new, more sustainable cuisine.

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

The City of Bruges is taking steps towards implementing the Brugse Smaakt and the Green Deal on protein shifts through municipally-led events and actions around public and private canteens. In 2017, the City launched a MANNA project for serving sustainable food at city events and public meetings. Since signing the Green Deal, the City has been committed to leading by example by serving 60% plant-based foods. Going forward, Bruges hopes to use its leadership by serving climate-friendly meals to children across its 120 schools – tackling food access, education, and sustainability at the same time.

CO-BARRIERS

Getting everyone around the table

According to Karine De Batselier who coordinates the City of Bruges involvement in the Food Lab, their greatest success has been bringing people together and setting the tone for actions on sustainable food across the city. However, getting the right people on board is not always easy nor without its disappointments, such as agreeing on what constitutes “sustainable food” or how to balance economic and sustainability imperatives. To overcome this barrier, Karine and other members of the Food Lab invest significantly in effective communication in different sectors and policy departments to listen to all points of view and reach compromises.

MEASURING IMPACT: LOCATING THE RIGHT METRICS AND DATA FOR MONITORING FOOD STRATEGIES

Finding the right metrics and data for monitoring the impact of the Brugse Smaakt initiatives remains a challenge for the City. However, one area where it is possible to measure CO2-emissions reductions is food waste. Bruges measures food wasted from the City’s supermarkets and estimates the GHG emission reductions that could be achieved if the City reduced food waste.

The City has also used a self-declaration survey for citizens to measure the impact of recipes and tips shared by the City for reducing food waste at the household level. For Bruges’s Farm to Fork and Fair Trade strategies, complete the right data, but has not yet implemented this method. While the City has an overview of the foods that are produced locally and the number of food products sold in shops across the city, these numbers are not always accurate and difficult to associate to measurable impacts on climate change. A Flemish-wide working group for cities developing sustainable food strategies will provide a forum to overcome this issue. However, work is still underway to develop relevant indicators.

The integral role of the Bruges Food Lab in the City’s sustainable food strategy demonstrates the power of getting citizens, farmers, researchers, businesses, schools, and policy-makers around the table when it comes to designing and implementing integrated food policies. Beyond developing appropriate policies, having inclusive food governance mechanisms enables diverse actors to build trust and work together. The same can be said of collaboration across different levels of government. Bruges’ collaboration also extends to the regional government and other cities in the provinces unlock new possibilities for the creation of sustainable and local food systems.