



COOL FOOD PRO

FINAL PROJECT REPORT

APRIL 2021 – JUNE 2023

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OVERVIEW



Food production creates a quarter of the world's greenhouse gas emissions. Reducing food waste and moving towards a healthy and sustainable diet is a major opportunity to reduce the environmental impact of the food we eat.

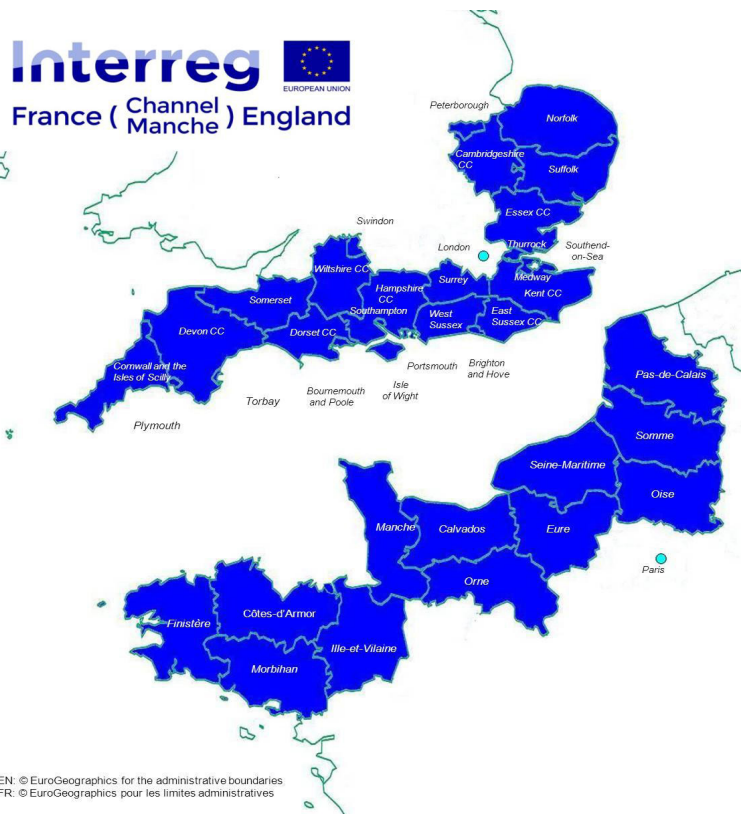
Cool Food Pro promotes behaviour change in public and private sector catering with a free digital carbon reduction calculator to model and make step-by-step changes, onsite support, and a range of free downloadable resources. This report gives a summary of the Soil Association's involvement in the project between April 2021 and March 2023.

PROJECT INTRODUCTION

Cool Food Pro is a cross-border collaborative project between England and France, delivered by a team of five partner organisations. The University of Western Brittany (UBO) lead the project, supported by Maison de la Bio 29 and Laboceca in France, and PECT (Peterborough Environment City Trust) and the Soil Association in the UK. Lead partner, UBO, managed the project and developed the research methodology of the CO2 calculator. Support partners contributed their expertise on sustainable catering, utilising their knowledge and experience of the catering sector to support caterers to move to more sustainable working practices.

Cool Food Pro was a two-year project funded by the Interreg France (Channel) England Programme, an EU funded programme which supports innovative projects with social and environmental benefits in the south of the UK and northern France. The total Soil Association budget for the project was £235,621 over 27 months, 69% of which was funded by Interreg. This includes funding to host the project website for five years post project.

Interreg 
France (Channel
Manche) England



EN: © EuroGeographics for the administrative boundaries
FR: © EuroGeographics pour les limites administratives

WHAT IS COOL FOOD PRO?

Cool Food Pro is a carbon reduction calculator that promotes changes in practice for catering organisations across five main categories:

- Sourcing more produce which is:
 - i. Local
 - ii. Seasonal
 - iii. Organic
- Using less but better meat and fish
- Reducing food and packaging waste

Caterers choose target areas to suit their organisation. They can be flexible in their approach, tailoring the calculator to set individual targets within any budgetary, purchasing, or staffing constraints. They can then model the impact of potential changes made and visualise in real time the positive environmental impact, particularly on the **climate** (CO₂e.) but also on **water, biodiversity,** and their **finances**. After committing to one or more target areas, each month caterers enter quantitative data on the sustainable actions taken which enables them to see the subsequent monthly and cumulative environmental savings.

The carbon calculator also hosts a good practice library, so caterers can commit to qualitative as well as quantitative targets.



METHODOLOGY

The methodology to calculate the environmental impact of changes in practice was developed by lead partner UBO using a range of sources, predominantly the [French Agribalyse database from Ademe](#).

The purpose of the calculator is to estimate the environmental impacts of making healthier and more sustainable catering decisions, but it does not claim to present exact values. Calculations are based on broad supply and production trends and estimates, falling within 'scope 3' emissions which are indirect emissions linked to the production of a product, its use, and its end-of-life.

The full methodology can be found in the member portal on the [Cool Food Pro website](#).

PROJECT RESULTS

Cool Food Pro set out to co-design a free, low-carbon web application with future end-users such as catering managers and kitchen staff, to measure the progress of restaurants in real time on various indicators: CO2 savings, biodiversity, food waste, and water consumption.

The development of a low carbon support programme through the website would also support beneficiaries in more sustainable practices, enabling them to communicate their work, and savings made, to customers and clients.

All project targets were exceeded:

THE COOL FOOD PRO PROJECT RESULTS



37 UK
74 FR

CATERERS SUPPORTED
TO MAKE POSITIVE
CHANGE



OVER 2 MILLION

CONSUMERS ENCOURAGED
TO MAKE SUSTAINABLE
FOOD CHOICES



1530T

OF CO²
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Project targets outlined in the bid:

- A reduction of GHG emissions of at least 1000 tonnes
- 50,000 consumers reached through the provision of a sustainable meal by their caterers, educational workshops, or communication resources
- 100 sites supported to reduce the environmental impact of the food they serve

CATERER ENGAGEMENT

PILOT PHASE

Cool Food Pro partners supported a total of 15 pilot sites across England and France. Soil Association worked with three sites, two workplace restaurants and a school:

CH and Co.,

Gather and Gather at Whitman Laboratories, Gather and Gather at Unum Ltd

Norse Catering

Queen's Hill Primary and Nursery School

The site locations were spread across the funded area, incorporating three UK counties. Pilot sites were supported for eighteen months, with the testing of the first version of the carbon calculator, co-design of the project website, systems and support procedures, and the communication and educational resources for client and customer engagement.

ROLL-OUT PHASE

Soil Association engaged with ten further sites in the roll-out phase, incorporating schools, hospitals, universities, and independent caterers. Sites were recruited through existing Food for Life Served Here licensees, with further connections made through the 2022 Food and Mood project and the Food for Life Schools Award.

Eight ambassadors were recruited and trained by the Cool Food Pro team to use the carbon calculator and website member portal. Ambassadors were then able to engage their networks, rolling out to 15 further sites from Norse Catering and 100 from Thomas Franks Catering.

Despite challenges – supply issues, rising food costs and staff shortages – caterers engaged well with the calculator, appreciating its ease of use, flexibility, and user-friendly features. Caterers working on just two or three target areas were able to easily see and measure the impact and significant environmental savings of even small modifications to working practices. For example, Norwich School, catered by Thomas Franks, reduced meat in three dishes and served these twice a month to 600 students. Between September and March, they saved 29,940 CO₂e.



TRAINING AND EVENTS

Soil Association delivered a programme of training events to eight ambassadors from: Norse Catering, Caterlink, CH and Co, Devon Food Partnership, Thomas Franks, and the Food for Life Business Development team

Initial training was delivered online with a face-to-face workshop at the Cross Channel Forum in September 2022. Training and online support for ambassadors continued with monthly 121 calls and bi-monthly group sessions during which ambassadors shared successes and challenges. The Cool Food Pro team shared resource and feature updates during group sessions and also used the time to collect case studies and social media content. Sessions were well attended and feedback positive from the group.

The project team supported the delivery of a Cross Channel Forum in London in September 2022. The event brought together catering professionals and experts, culminating in a video conference with French partners, pilot, roll-out sites, and ambassadors. The event included sessions by experts from Soil Association, CH and Co. and WRAP, experience sharing from pilot sites, and practical workshops delivered by the Cool Food Pro team on food waste, building a climate friendly menu and the carbon calculator.

Steering committees met every six months. Soil Association hosted the fourth meeting at Spear House in Bristol, hosting partners and the catering manager and head chef from French pilot site Central University Hospital (CUH), Brest. During steering committee five in Brest, a return visit to CUH enabled shared learning and an exchange of ideas and working practices.



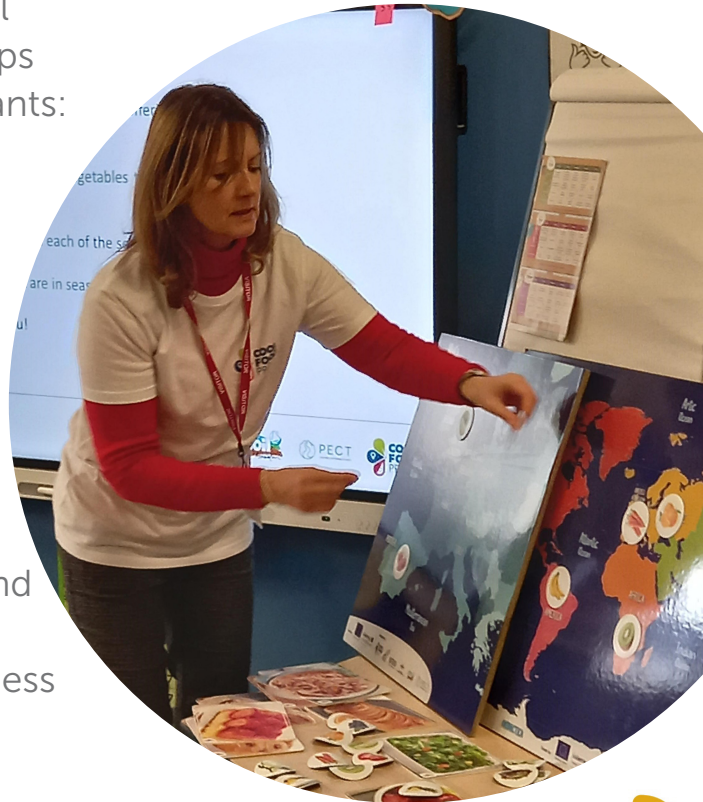
EDUCATION DELIVERY

During the roll-out phase in year two, the Cool Food Pro team delivered educational workshops in schools, universities, and workplace restaurants:

- Unum Ltd
- Whitman Laboratories
- Brighton University
- IDS – Sussex University
- Queen’s Hill Primary School
- The Norfolk School

Using interactive Cool Food Pro resources co-designed and developed by project partners and pilot sites, the team were able to engage with over 300 customers and pupils, raising awareness of the positive environmental impacts food choices can make.

Customers at both Unum and Whitman said they would reflect changes being made by the caterers in their own homes and with their families. For example, several customers said they planned to use less but better meat and increase vegetarian meals and plant proteins following our discussion and resource sharing.



COMMUNICATION

PRESS

There has been extensive press coverage over the two-year project, mainly online, including several articles in key catering publications: Public Sector Catering, LACA and Hospital Food and Service

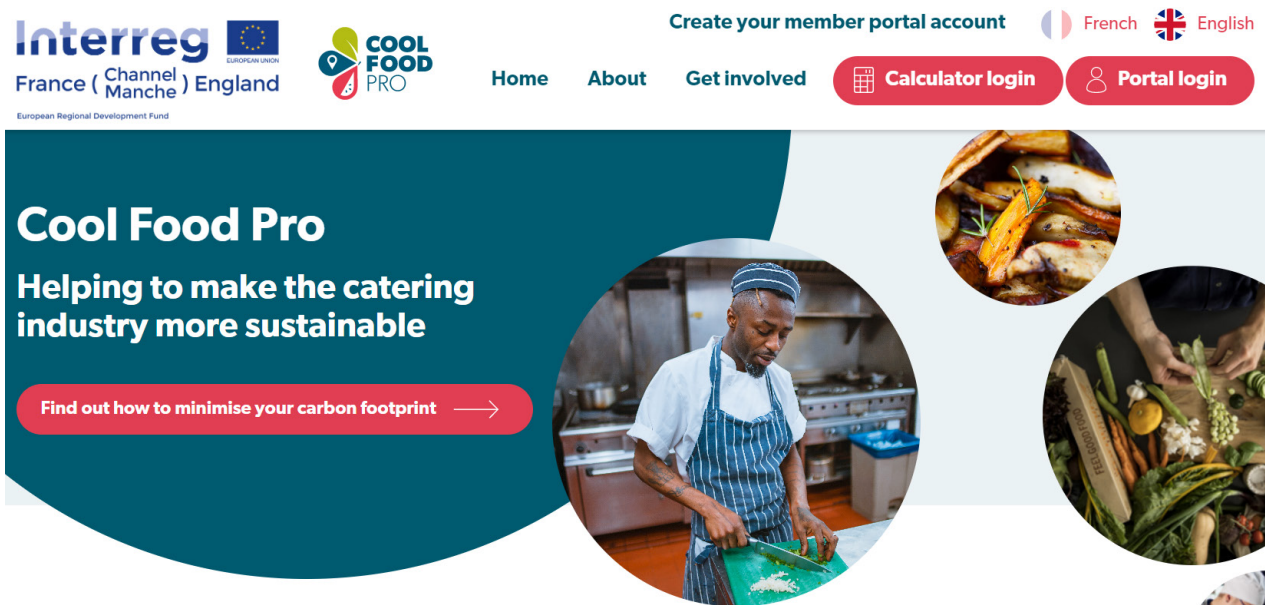
A feature in Sustain’s newsletter in January 2023 had a reach of 53,000.

The total reach of all press coverage was 321,408.

WEBSITE

Soil Association created the [Cool Food Pro website](#) to host the carbon calculator and member portal which includes free downloadable resources, training videos and user guides to enable caterers to use Cool Food Pro independently, post project closure. Created collaboratively between the Soil Association digital team and an external digital agency, the full website was designed and built in a period of six months, going live in June 2022.

The complex build involved an application programming interface (API) facilitating communication from the calculator to the website. This enables the environmental savings made to be pulled through to the homepage (global results) and member portal (individual sites' results) via a unique code and then displayed on downloadable resources to communicate to customers and clients.



SOCIAL MEDIA

Cool Food Pro content shared on Food for Life channels received positive engagement, and sharing tagged content from school visits had particularly high reach on Twitter. 54 posts with relevant hashtags sharing the project and its impact were published across Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn with a total reach of 14,000. Cool Food Pro was included in Food for Life Served Here's monthly catering newsletter.

Engagement on LinkedIn was higher than the Food for Life average, with 177 engagements, a 6% engagement rate and 100 link clicks. LinkedIn is predominantly a B2B platform, particularly driving up caterer sign ups.



IMPACT

Both pilot and roll out sites have reported a greater understanding of the impact of food on the environment and feel more confident in reducing climate emissions. They have raised awareness of catering's environmental impact for their teams, customers and clients, using the calculator results to evidence changes made such as food waste reduction and an increase in plant-based foods. Caterers have influenced suppliers with their purchasing choices, and influenced customers to choose planet-friendly meals by communicating sustainability goals.



“The visual effects of the savings you’re making are a real positive and help to present the data in a meaningful way”
CRAIG NEALE, OPERATIONS MANAGER, NORSE CATERING



Caterers have reported a number of benefits as a direct result of their work with Cool Food Pro:

- Using less but better meat and increasing plant proteins
- Raising staff and customer awareness of food waste
- Financial savings
- Reducing CO2 without negative impact on food quality
- A better understanding on how to reduce their environmental impact

In addition to this, caterers have highlighted other benefits to their organisations:

- Sustainability teams using Cool Food Pro
- Nomination of sustainability ambassadors within units across the business
- Improving links with schools and other sites
- Awareness of personal CO2 impact
- Highlighting the importance of food waste and CO2 reduction
- Understanding the environmental impact of the catering sector

Pilot and roll-out sites have outlined aspirations for Cool Food Pro, including rolling out the calculator to additional sites, educating staff, and enhancing environmental impact reduction practices from a catering perspective.

PROJECT LEGACY

The support to caterers during the two year project has been limited to the funded area of the France Channel England (FCE) region. There is now an opportunity to expand and roll the project out nationally, utilising Food for Life Served Here and Green Kitchen Standard Awards networks. Cool Food Pro enables caterers to achieve both Awards' sustainability criteria.

Cool Food Pro reinforces Food for Life's national good food movement by:

- Supporting caterers to source sustainable producers
- Using food to tackle climate and nature emergencies
- Strengthening communities by guiding caterers to local food procurement
- Increasing awareness of food's impact on climate change
- Expanding customer awareness of food choices and environmental impact
- Raising awareness of nature-friendly land practices

"It opened my customers' eyes to how much food they waste."

EMMA DUKE, CATERING MANAGER, WHITMAN LABORATORIES

High engagement shows that Cool Food Pro is a popular, user-friendly product which caterers are using not only to reduce their own environmental impact, but to support their clients to achieve sustainability targets.

Thomas Franks, who cater two roll-out sites, The Norwich School and IDS, have introduced Cool Food Pro to all of their 100+ sites. This includes settings in Malta and Portugal, furthering the geographical spread and impact of the project.

"We will continue to use the tool and the knowledge we have gained from it to continue to increase our sustainability and reduce our environmental impact."

NORSE CATERING

INTERNAL TEAM

To effectively deliver the diverse work packages of Cool Food Pro, the Soil Association project team has drawn on experience and expertise across the organisation:

Policy – expertise, knowledge, and research on environmental impact of food systems, existing carbon calculator products

Impact and Innovations – beneficiary focus groups, interviews, ambassador training programme, beneficiary questionnaire

Business Development – pilot, roll-out site and ambassador recruitment and support, co-design of the calculator and support programme, product knowledge, expertise in practices and resources, extensive experience of public and private sector catering.

Digital – co-design, development, testing and delivery of the project website

Finance – funder claims, reporting, staff workstreams

Comms – promotion on social media channels, press releases, case studies and blogs

Cross-team working throughout the project highlighted the benefits to the Healthy and Sustainable Diets programme team by: promoting a collaborative approach; sharing experience and knowledge; adding value to existing programmes; working together towards shared goals; amplifying connections between settings-based work and caterers.

Working as part of the cross-border project team has enabled developing solutions to a range of challenges which often differ between countries. The roll-out of the support program throughout the funded area with a greater reach and impact is evidence of the impact of this cross-border collaborative work, funded by Interreg.

Collaborating and exchanging ideas from a wide variety of experience and expertise has enabled wider learning which can be taken forward as part of the continuation of Cool Food Pro and other programmes.

CONCLUSION

The Cool Food Pro project exceeded all targets outlined in the project bid, within budget and to agreed timelines.

Over the past two years, solid foundations have been prepared through work with key pilot and roll-out sites. Several significant catering organisations are now rolling Cool Food Pro out further across their business. Investment by Soil Association to date has enabled the development of free, digital products created using credible and professionally researched methodology and which are currently widely used by UK and French caterers. These are ready to promote further across the Food for Life network of UK caterers, throughout France and into Europe.

Cool Food Pro has supported public and private sector catering by promoting the purchase of organic, local, and seasonal products, using less but better meat, and reduction of food and packaging waste which, it is hoped, will lead to long term change in more sustainable practices across the sector.

Aligning with many aspects of the Soil Association strategy, Cool Food Pro has reinforced Food for Life's work towards a national good food movement and demonstrates the commitment to the transformation of the way we eat and care for our natural world.



WE'VE JOINED COOL FOOD PRO TO CREATE PLANET FRIENDLY MENUS.

Small changes can make a big environmental impact.

Ask your chefs what actions they have taken.

A circular graphic with a dark blue background and white text. The background of the circle is filled with images of various fresh vegetables like green beans, corn, and carrots.