

# Sustainable Urban Food Systems

This is a collaborative project organised by three internationally renowned universities, i.e. the University of Padua (Italy), the University of Sydney (Australia) and the University of Lausanne (Switzerland). This year's edition will be hosted at the University of Lausanne campus. The project class will be composed of a mix of students from the three above-mentioned universities (up to 60 students).

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## Project Brief

Food systems lie at the heart of sustainable urban development. Cities must ensure access to healthy and affordable food for growing populations while simultaneously reducing environmental pressure, strengthening resilience, and promoting social justice. In the context of climate change, biodiversity loss, food insecurity, and global trade transformations, urban food systems have become a critical lever for action toward achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular Goal 12 on Responsible Consumption and Production.

This project invites interdisciplinary student teams to explore how urban food systems can be transformed to become more resilient, sustainable, and inclusive. Students will engage with questions such as:

- How can cities reconcile food security with environmental sustainability?
- How can urban governance foster agroecological transitions and ecosystem services?
- How can responsible consumption practices reshape production models?
- What roles do citizen-consumers, farmers, food businesses, and policymakers play in enabling systemic change?
- How can innovation and technology contribute to healthier and more equitable food systems?
- How can local initiatives influence global food system transformation?

Through collaborative research and applied case study work, students will design innovation-led initiatives that respond to real-world challenges identified by civil society actors, private sector stakeholders, and city representatives.

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## Project Partners

The project is coordinated by the University of Lausanne (HEC Lausanne – Enterprise for Society), in collaboration with international academic experts, institutional partners, and stakeholders engaged in food governance and nutrition.

The programme builds on ongoing research and applied projects from the Nutrition in City Ecosystems (NICE) initiative, implemented by a Swiss consortium addressing food and nutrition security in secondary cities across Africa and Asia. It will also enable students to engage with political, institutional and private actors of urban food systems directly in the area of the University of Lausanne, to better grasp real time and concrete issues in different contexts.

Students will engage directly with:

- City representatives from Lausanne, Vevey, Geneva and international partner cities from the NICE project.
- Urban farms and food enterprises in the Lausanne and Vevey regions.
- International organisations and UN agencies based in Geneva.
- Civil society organisations working on food, sustainability and inclusion.

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## Project Context

Urbanisation, climate change, and globalised trade have profoundly reshaped food systems. While cities concentrate economic opportunity and innovation capacity, they also intensify environmental pressures, social inequalities, and vulnerabilities in food supply chains.

Food systems are currently exceeding multiple planetary boundaries, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions, biodiversity loss, soil degradation, and water pollution. At the same time, malnutrition, obesity, food insecurity, and food injustice persist across both high-income and low-income settings.

Urban food systems sit at the intersection of agriculture, public health, economic development, environmental protection, and social inclusion. Their transformation requires coordination across governance levels and stakeholders, from producers and distributors to consumers and policymakers.

International reports, including recent work by the HLPE, the IPCC, and the EAT–Lancet Commission, highlight the urgent need to redesign food systems to ensure resilience, sustainability, and equity. Cities are increasingly recognised as critical arenas for implementing this transformation.

The project positions students at the interface between:

- Local urban governance
- International policy frameworks
- Civil society innovation
- Private sector initiatives
- Agroecological transition strategies
- Urban and peri-urban production systems

By connecting local field visits, international institutions in Geneva, and global case studies, the programme creates a multi-scalar learning environment linking theory, policy, and practice.

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## Project Scope

With its interdisciplinary academic framework and strong engagement with city stakeholders and international organisations, the Sustainable Urban Food Systems project invites global student teams to develop practicable, innovation-led solutions addressing concrete urban food challenges.

Students will work in interdisciplinary and intercultural teams to analyse real-world case studies focusing on:

- Citizen participation and inclusion in food governance
- Responsible consumption and sustainable production practices
- Agroecological transition and ecosystem services
- Urban food policy and city-level coordination
- Food equity and access
- Circular economy approaches in urban food contexts
- Multi-stakeholder collaboration mechanisms
- Production in an urban and peri-urban context

Some suggested directions that students may explore include:

- Designing governance mechanisms that enhance citizen participation in urban food strategies.
- Developing innovative business or partnership models linking farmers, food businesses, and urban consumers.
- Proposing actionable pathways for cities to operationalise SDG 12 at local level.
- Leveraging agroecology and ecosystem services to strengthen urban–rural linkages.
- Creating strategies that reconcile climate commitments with equitable access to healthy diets.
- Identifying tools to foster interdisciplinary collaboration and stakeholder engagement in complex urban food transitions.

The final deliverables will include an oral presentation to academic experts and city stakeholders, as well as a structured working paper integrating theoretical frameworks and practical recommendations.

Through this applied, learning-by-doing approach, students will contribute to advancing the transition toward more resilient, sustainable, and inclusive urban food systems at both local and global levels.