

What Happens When 200,000 Kids Learn Food Literacy

[00:00:00] **Narrator:** Welcome to the Food Fight podcast from EIT Food. In today's episode, we hear from Fabienne, a leader in food education, who grew up on a French organic farm where food was more than just sustenance, it was a way of life. Her childhood experience of growing, harvesting, and sharing meals shaped her understanding of sustainability and community, inspiring her to bridge the gap between children and the food they eat

[00:00:26] **Fabienne Ruault:** Hi, I'm Fabienne Ruault.

I work at EAT Food, and I lead the Food Educators project. So I was raised on a French organic farm where food wasn't just something you ate. We grew it, we harvested, we shared it, so I learned very early on about season sustainability, but also about commensality, sitting down at a table and sharing food.

These are no longer part of kids' environment anymore. That gap doesn't just [00:01:00] affect their health, but it also affects their future, possibly their career choices, and even their ability to engage with the world around them. So Food Educators is really a way to bridge that gap so that every child, and then every person, has the chance to connect with food the way I did and to develop their food literacy for their-- a better f- future for them, but also for our society.

And I think what gives, uh, me hope for Food Educators is, and for the future is, seeing the teachers, their energy, their creativity. They are remarkable people, and they are the ones who shape the minds of our kids, of, of the future of society. So seeing them and what they're doing in the classrooms i- is just fantastic.

[00:01:56] **Narrator:** Fabienne founded Food Educators, a Europe-wide initiative that [00:02:00] empowers teachers to become change makers in their classrooms. By equipping educators with innovative lesson plans, training, and resources, the program helps students develop food literacy, the knowledge, skills, and values needed to make informed choices about food throughout their lives.

[00:02:15] **Fabienne Ruault:** Uh, Food Educators is a Europe-wide food education initiative. Food is everywhere. It's on our plates. We eat it every day, but it also impacts further than our individual, uh, selves. Food shapes our

health but also drives public policy, um, sustainability. It's linked to our economies, and under- understanding it is key, uh, for understanding the world we live in.

So at Food Educators, we're trying to really bridge that gap. We are equipping teachers with the tools and confidence they need to inspire the next generation about food, but also tell [00:03:00] them about careers that enables food to come to our tables. At Food Educators, we really believe that teachers are change makers.

So we create a future where everyone, where all young people have access to food education and have better level of food literacy when they leave school. Food literacy is a complex concept. Very early on in the creation process of the program, we came across this concept in the academic literature. Food literacy was used mostly in, um, the States, in Canada, in Australia.

It was coming to Europe through Britain, but it wasn't very much used as a concept in the rest of Europe in their everyday lives. But it, it is a set of knowledge, skills, and values that are necessary for people to plan, manage, select, prepare, and consume food, and it [00:04:00] enables people to ... individuals to develop positive relationship with food throughout their lives and navigate, engage, and participate in the complex food system.

So very factual knowledge individuals need, of course, but we see that it's not enough. Factual knowledge is, are very important, but when it comes to food literacy and the way we consume food for ourselves and in our society, we need to go further. So a second d- dimension that we defined for food literacy is the procedural knowledge, because everyone will have to cook a meal, will have to plan their groceries, go to a shop, and know how to read a label.

And on a third dimension that we add to that is the critical reflection and the engagement, so why it matters, not only how to do, what to know, but why it matters. So that goes back to what I was [00:05:00] saying earlier, that food is everywhere, and it's at the heart of our society. So we move beyond the individual health and the focus on ourselves, and we look at the critical evaluation of the food systems we live in, the ability for people to form connections between their health, the food, the society, the environment, et cetera.

And further than that, we try to empower people to actually start advocating, become multipliers, talk to others about their practices, and hope that others will increase their food literacy and will become more critical and engaged about the

food they eat What we do in food educa- in the food educators is one part of the food literacy.

We use the teachers as multipliers, so we, in the third dimension

that I was just mentioning, the critical reflection and [00:06:00] engagement, our teachers are the multipliers. They allow kids to, young people to develop those other skills, but it's one of the tools that we need to put in place, of course, to, to see a Europe where everyone has a good enough food literacy level.

We based our methodology on teachers' surveys and on our teachers' advisory board, so 10 teachers that we help us build our offering told us is that first of all, there is very little resources and means in the school systems i- in Europe, unfortunately. Teachers are not trained to talk about food, I mentioned that earlier.

And what they seem-- what they said they need are clearer concepts, so for instance, when we talk about circular economy food systems, they, they want to know what it means, and they want [00:07:00] to be able to talk about it confidently in the classrooms, and they ask for easy-to-implement materials. What they also ask for is the development of more digital tools, more games, videos, and interactive materials, and basically support in developing more learnings, their own learnings around food.

[00:07:24] **Narrator:** Food literacy goes beyond knowing what to eat. It encompasses understanding how to plan meals, read labels, and critically engage with the complex food systems that shape our world.

[00:07:34] **Fabienne Ruault:** We developed lesson plans, first in English, and then translated and adapted in 16 languages. Our lesson plans are developed around different topics.

They are challenge-based, playful around system thinking, and they work-- they really focus on key Food literacy dimensions, so healthy eating, [00:08:00] sustainability, sys-systems mapping, systems thinking. On this basis, we've developed a training methodology for teachers to build this knowledge and confidence. So we are giving them very easy lesson plans to implement in classrooms, and we also build their confidence and their knowledge during training.

Uh, we try to have the trainings in person because we also want to create this, um, network and the possibility to do peer-to-peer learnings and to, uh, share,

uh, good practices. But we also have some online resources and online trainings that are available. And a third very important thing to link this resources training and more in-person activities with the kids, we also have a number of career days that connect students with professionals in farms or food companies, researchers, a number of, um, food [00:09:00] professionals.

We allow the kids to go and see what's happening in the food system and hopefully make them... interest them in a, in a career in the food system. We are supported by a number, 15 national partners, a network of national partners that we call our local hubs. And without them, the, the project wouldn't work because what we've seen in our research is that the knowledge, as I mentioned before, is very important, but the practicality is also key for the, for the teachers.

So those national partners enable us to have, to Connects to the local reality and, and adapt our materials and our methodology to their national truth. They translate our resources into 15 languages, uh, they work with. They, uh, deliver the trainings, the in-person trainings, and they connect with the schools.

They, um, [00:10:00] launch the discussions at national level with the Ministry of Education, for instance, to introduce food education and food literacy in their national curriculas. So they are really key to the implementation on the ground. We have those 15 national partners in, uh, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and Turkey.

So if you're in one of those countries and you want to connect, please have a look at our website and find the contacts of your national partner online.

[00:10:45] **Narrator:** The program's impact is remarkable. In just three years, Food Educators has reached teachers and students across 15 European countries. From Michelin-star restaurant visits in Hungary to food environment mapping in Prague, teachers are [00:11:00] using these resources to spark curiosity, deepen understanding, and inspire the next generation of food-conscious citizens

[00:11:08] **Fabienne Ruault:** We have implemented more than 100 teachers training, 50 career days, and we've reached, through all of our activities, close to 200,000 students across Europe.

Concrete evidence that we see from them is that program has increased student, student curiosity in the topic, has improved their understanding of sustainability, and has brought them more interest in the agri-food careers. Our teachers report

that the resources save time, that they feel that they've increased their classroom engagements.

They could focus on something else than developing the lesson plans, but really help with this making complex topic easier to, um, teach. [00:12:00] So our success is really our training methodology. We've been certified, and we got the EAT label for it, so we recognize at E- at EU level, and we've even used some of our teachers training in national teachers training catalogs, which was a big success for us.

And in concrete terms, what we've seen happen is, for instance, in Hungary, kids were taken to Michelin star restaurants and had the chance to talk to chefs. In Croatia, we've, uh, seen teachers create their own puppet show to talk about food and present it to the kids. In Czech Republics-- In Czech Republic, we had teenagers taking around Prague to map their food environment and realize how the offerings and the, the food environments impacts [00:13:00] their consumption and their, um, own food habits.

So these are really concrete examples where we see that the teachers Go the extra step because we empower them to do so. It's really great to see. So one of the main challenges we've had is really this bridging the gap between our lesson plans in English, what our scientists and our teachers have created in English, and the actual situation on the ground.

And that's... I've mentioned it before, but what's helped us a lot in bridging that was the network of our national partners. They, through their experience and thanks to their local networks, they are able to not only translate our lesson plans, but really nationalize them so that they make sense and find a way to plug [00:14:00] our lesson plans within their own curriculum.

So our lesson plans can be used by biology teachers, but we also encourage all sort of teachers to teach about food. So we've seen art teachers, math teachers, language teachers use our lesson plans, and the national partners allow us to find those multipliers and to connect with them and to give them extra push to encourage them to actually use food as a topic in their classrooms.

That's been a real challenge, but also so diverse and really empowering to see. So that's been great. The program came originally from the learnings of a number of projects that we're implementing as part of EAT Food's grants and EAT Food's call for projects. [00:15:00] So in 2018, when we did the first call for projects at EAT Food, we selected...

So we asked our partners on what they wanted to work on, and a lot of them have expressed interest in working with kids. So in the early years, as part of the public engagement portfolio of projects, we've seen partners develop very diverse projects with children in schools, at home, in supermarkets, very diverse things.

Unfortunately, what we've seen also is that those projects were great during the lifespan of the project but were sort of dying off at the end of the financing period, even though they had created so much content and really great quality [00:16:00] activities. So what we've done is we've sort of tried to put in place a strategy, an umbrella project that would be able to reuse all of this content and find a way to make it as sustainable as possible and as, of course, also targeted as possible, and that's how Food Educators came to be.

We, uh, in 2022, we did a sort of proof of concept project where we had a working group for six months think about the best way to reuse this content and put it into a concrete program, and that's where we decided to really focus work on the teachers And allow for this multipli- multiplying effect to happen.

So in 2023, we were able to create the basic strategy for Food Educators [00:17:00] and start with the lesson plans drafting, and that's took us some time to create the website and the catalog of, uh, resources to, um, then select our national partners. In 2023, we had the 15 hubs selected. We had the R22 lesson plans in the website, and that's where we really started implementing Food Educators the way we know it today.

So on the future directions and the looking ahead for the project, we've spent the last two years in building a strong website, strong resources, a great community of teachers and national hubs. So what we want in 2026 and for the years to come is really to maintain this alive, to continue providing teachers with the trainings and w- with webinars to develop their skills and knowledge, continue offering [00:18:00] our content for free, our lesson plans on the website, and building our international school network further.

We are always looking for partners for new visions, so again, if you want to collaborate, reach out, go to our website, foodeducators.eu, and we'd be super happy to start discussions.

[00:18:23] **Narrator:** Fabienne's vision for Food Educators is clear: create a sustainable, accessible platform that keeps teachers supported and students engaged.

By maintaining free resources, offering ongoing training, and building an international network, she's ensuring that every young person in Europe has the opportunity to develop the food literacy they need for a better future. Thank you for tuning in to this week's episode of the Food Fight podcast. If you'd like to find out more, then check out the EIT Food website at eitfood.eu and join the conversation via the hashtag #EITFoodFight on LinkedIn.

And of course, if you haven't already, [00:19:00] please hit the follow button so you never miss an episode.