

7t Think Tank: Reducing Vienna's Material Footprint Through Sustainable Food Systems

Executive Summary: A Sufficiency Toolkit for Consumer Goods (Food) in the City of Vienna

Challenge 3 – Sufficiency Toolkit: Practical Solutions to Keep Material Footprints Below 7t per Capita

The challenge: Vienna's material footprint stands at 14 tons per capita, double the 7-ton target set by its own circular economy strategy. Food is the single largest driver of consumption-related environmental damage, responsible for 49% of the EU's total consumption footprint, with animal products overwhelmingly dominant. The evidence is clear: dietary shifts toward plant-based foods represent one of the most impactful actions for reducing this footprint.

The proposal: The Vienna Food Footprint Toolkit combines a consumer-facing digital tool with municipal policy reform and community food infrastructure support. Grounded in Doughnut Economics and the principle of sufficiency, it empowers citizens without burdening them, reforms institutions where leverage is greatest, and builds community infrastructure that makes sustainable choices the easy default. Three instruments:

1. A consumer-facing app ("Your Food Footprint") making food's material footprint visible through product scanning, lower-impact swaps, and a map of Vienna's sustainable food infrastructure. A working prototype has been developed.
2. Municipal procurement reform integrating material footprint criteria into Vienna's ÖkoKauf+ and naBe frameworks, targeting the 100,000 public meals served daily in school, hospital, and care-home canteens.
3. Community food infrastructure support for Vienna's cooperative sector (MILA, Morgenrot, Um's Eck) through subsidized space, mentorship, and digital platform integration.

The impact: Under a moderate scenario (25% participation, two meat meals replaced per week), combined with procurement reform, Vienna could reduce its material footprint by approximately 390,000 tons annually, or 7.9% of the city's total required reduction at the ambitious level. These are conservative estimates: they exclude supply-chain restructuring effects, and when combined with institutional procurement reform, the effects are both significant and scalable across European cities.

Scalability: The toolkit builds on EU-wide procurement standards and existing networks (CLEVERFOOD/Horizon Europe, Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, C40 Good Food Cities) and is designed for replication.

The ask: Pilot the toolkit in Vienna as a model for EU-wide urban food system transformation.

Prepared by the 7t Think Tank, CEU Vienna, March 2025. All figures are sourced and referenced in the accompanying policy brief. Full brief and app prototype available on request.