

ORGANIC FOOD TRANSITION TO SUPPORT BIOREGION DEVELOPMENT IN VIDZEME REGION, LATVIA



The transition arena in Vidzeme region was started in October 2023 by a Bioregion Forum where 200 individuals signed a Memorandum with an ambitious goal to develop the Gauja National Park into a Bioregion. The transition arena workshops focusing on organic food and Bioregion development were organised in the Municipality of Cēsis in spring 2024. The process engaged local actors to envision an ideal food system, define action plan and develop initiatives to be implemented by the established Bioregion Initiative Group.

PARTICIPANTS

About 100 individuals participated in the three arena workshops, including entrepreneurs, farmers, politicians, representatives from national institutions, educational institutions, municipalities, organic farmers, local organic food market organisers, school principals and tourism entrepreneurs.

IDENTIFIED CHALLENGES

The transition arena on organic food was a continuation of the Bioregion Memorandum signed by more than 200 people in a Bioregion Forum in October 2023.

The Memorandum expressed support for the establishment of the first Bioregion in Latvia within Gauja National Park, identifying 8 priority areas. "How to promote the consumption of local and organic food" was chosen as the challenge for the arena workshops.

ABOUT THE PROCESS

The arena workshops envisioned an ideal food system for the Vidzeme Bioregion over a 10 year perspective. Action plans were defined, and responsibilities allocated to collectively achieve this goal.

Participants worked in five subtopic groups: 1) consumption habits, 2) dining out and public catering, 3) supermarkets and food producers, 4) agriculture, 5) governance, cooperation, education.

RESULTS

Altogether five initiatives were co-created during the process:

- "School Rye Bread" - offering children rye bread and honey, honoring traditions and introducing organic products into the school menu
- "BIO-bus" - mobile organic food sales, promoting the recognition of organic farmers
- "I'd eat local food" - compilation of local organic food producers offers
- "Open days at organic farms" - building trust and developing business
- "School Restaurant Week in Cēsis" - an event to encourage reform in school catering systems by introducing benefits of organic food for municipality, schools, children and parents.



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School Restaurant Week was voted for immediate implementation. As part of the initiative, an organic food competition was launched in schools across Cēsis, encouraging classes and their teachers to compete for the prize: an educational visit to a restaurant and meeting with a professional chef who emphasises the use of organic products.

To enter the competition, each class, in collaboration with the school cook or teacher, had to prepare a meal that met nutritional standards and was made using organic products from local farms. The preparation process was documented, with participants submitting photos, videos, and the recipe to the competition organisers.

School Restaurant Week showcased the importance of a shared commitment to the value of local food. Among the winners, Cēsu Jaunā Skola stood out for its innovative approach to integrating local ingredients while still honoring traditional recipes in school meals. The initiative highlighted that local food should continue to be a vital part of school culture. It should be supported through education and awareness efforts among teachers, students, school staff, local government, and parents.



Other initiatives identified during the Vidzeme transition arena outlined a range of potential actions for advancing bioregional development. Among them is a practical proposal to train school chefs in the use of organic products as cooking with organic ingredients often requires adjusting recipes and techniques.

The outcomes of the transition arena were incorporated into both the Bioregion Action Plan and the Vidzeme Sustainable Food Strategy 2035. The second Bioregion Forum took place in May 2025 with a purpose to monitor progress and strengthen collaboration around a shared vision. The forum focused on promoting local economic development and emphasised the need for systemic approaches to address challenges within the bioregion and to support ongoing transformative efforts.

"There was a strong sense that both sides - the public sector and local actors - truly listened to and understood one another."

"I appreciate the process of starting with a vision and then identifying practical actions to bring it to life. The step-by-step approach is very effective."

CONTACT

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