

From Classroom to Kitchen: Young chefs in Gothenburg exploring the future of sustainable eating

By Maria Nehme O'Neill, Switch Food Hub in Gothenburg

At Ester Mosessons Gymnasium in Gothenburg, culinary education took a leap forward in 2025. Through a hands-on collaboration with the SWITCH Food Hub in Gothenburg, Sweden, second-year students in the restaurant and food programme immersed themselves in the world of sustainable, nutritious, and climate-smart gastronomy.

The initiative *“Enhancing the knowledge on healthy and sustainable food among culinary students in Gothenburg”*, aimed to combine theory and practice by connecting students with food producers, sustainability experts, and restaurant guests. The goal was to increase awareness and skills around three core principles of the Swedish SWITCH Hub: more whole grains, more plant-based food, and sustainable seafood on all citizen's plates.

Over the spring term, students developed new recipes, engaged in workshops, visited the Nordic Seafood Summit, and eventually served their creative, climate-calculated dishes to restaurant visitors at the school's own Restaurant Ester's.

Cooking with a sustainability focus

The highlight of the project came in April, when students proudly launched the Switch Menu at Restaurant Ester's. This specially curated, low-impact menu offered guests a full dining experience where each dish was accompanied by its calculated climate footprint, expressed in kilograms of CO₂ equivalents (CO₂e). It gave both students and diners a tangible sense of how everyday food choices relate to climate impact.

One of the standout dishes was a vibrant falafel plate, served with crisp Asian-style coleslaw and freshly baked pita bread. The falafel, made primarily from chickpeas and whole grain, *hydrothermal* bulgur - which boosts the grain's nutrients and uptake in our bodies - from Good Grains, offered a flavourful, protein-rich alternative to meat-based mains, with a low footprint of just 0.20 kg CO₂e. The tangy slaw, lightly dressed with sesame and vinegar, added a refreshing contrast to the warm, earthy fritters, while the homemade pita tied the elements together in a satisfying, climate-smart package.

Another popular starter was the honey-roasted carrots with hummus, topped with Gotlandic coral lentils. This dish was a celebration of Nordic plant-based cuisine. The sweetness of the roasted carrots paired beautifully with the creamy hummus, while the crunchy lentils—grown by Swedish legume pioneers Nordisk Råvara on the Swedish island of Gotland—provided both texture and nutrition. With a footprint of just 0.24 kg CO₂e, it illustrated how local, seasonal produce could anchor a sustainable menu without sacrificing taste or substance.

On the seafood side, the menu featured a comforting and aromatic lemon and dill-scented fish soup (a popular staple on Ester's menu – now reinterpreted!), enriched with local mussels and served with whole grain bread baked by the students. The broth was delicate yet full of flavour, with dill and elderflower vinegar lending a distinctly Nordic character. The addition of mussels—one of the most sustainable sources of animal protein—enhanced both the flavour profile and ecological message of the dish. At 0.60 kg CO₂e, it was one of the more climate-intensive options on the menu, yet still well below typical restaurant seafood dishes, thanks to the use of MSC-certified ingredients and the emphasis on whole grains.

These dishes, alongside several others, exemplified how climate-conscious choices in the kitchen could result in meals that were colourful, nutritious, and compelling—on both the palate and the planet. All fish and seafood used in the menu were either MSC-certified or marked as “green to eat” by the WWF Seafood Guide. The students left out the usage of red meats and poultry – proteins that are otherwise prominent on their regular, classic menu.

“It was good to learn how climate-impacting the food is. Many were surprised by how low the emissions actually were,” said student Victor Andréasson, reflecting on what stood out most in the process.

A Learning journey beyond the books

The SWITCH project wasn't just about serving food. It began with a large kick-off event where 95 students met food producers, participated in tastings, took part in a climate workshop using Lego, and attended lectures by experts from RISE and the Whole Grain Partnership (Fullkornsfrämjandet).

The students also collaborated directly with local and national food companies such as Good Grains, Green City Farming, Skafferi Värmland, Aquafood, and Nordisk Råvara. They tested ingredients, discussed food systems, and got inspired on creating recipes featuring legumes, whole grains, vertical-farmed greens, and seafood side-streams.

“It was fun to try new things. And to get inspiration for future recipes. I'm more careful now about what I use in my cooking,” said student Linnéa Nordberg, who felt the experience had changed her approach in the kitchen.

Real learning captured through visual media

Serving actual paying customers added another layer of learning. Students ran the kitchen and front-of-house at Restaurant Ester's during the 3rd and 4th of April, taking responsibility for everything from preparation to presentation. Guest surveys created by the activity leaders from RISE, showed positive reactions—not only to the flavors but also to the learning concept.

“I hope more culinary schools start doing things like this. It's both delicious and important,” one guest commented after their meal.

“It’s a really good way to learn. You get to do something concrete, something that feels real. Not just read about it in a book,” said teacher Therese Norell.

Overcoming challenges

Despite the activity’s success, the project faced real challenges. Activities planned for autumn 2024 had to be postponed due to student work placements and time clashes with their regular curriculum. Some students found the theoretical aspects less engaging, especially when disconnected from practical work. To address this, SWITCH adapted its strategy—developing ready-to-use classroom materials, integrating modules directly into the vocational curriculum, and focusing on hands-on and oral collaborative experiences.

These adjustments proved essential. By spring 2025, student engagement rose, and many reported increased interests in climate and health impacts of cooking.

“I learned that good food doesn’t have to harm the environment,” one student said during the project’s final evaluation.

A scalable model for the future?

As the SWITCH initiative wrapped up in June, it left behind a powerful insight for how culinary education could evolve. The combination of real-world collaboration, hands-on practice, climate literacy, and storytelling through film and other media proved both effective and inspiring.

The final recipe collection, developed by the students themselves, is now being prepared for publication. There are also plans to present the project outcomes at Malmö Sustainable Gastronomy Week in June, sharing insights with established chefs, educators from other parts of Sweden, and policymakers.

By showing that sustainability is not an add-on, but a core competence to be practiced and shared throughout all parts of culinary learning, the students at Ester Mosessons Gymnasium demonstrated that the sustainable dietary transition is not only possible—it’s already happening, dish by dish.

Culinary Switch Kick-off – Capturing the energy, inspiration, and collaboration with food producers and sustainability experts:

<https://vimeo.com/1050879955/c05cbd8521>

Showcasing students in action as they executed the Switch Menu:

<https://vimeo.com/1077992196?share=copy>