SUSTAINABLE PROCUREMENT FACTSHEET – FOOD PARCEL



This factsheet provides practical guidance for humanitarian procurement and programme teams to source food parcels more sustainably and from local production. It highlights key considerations throughout the product lifecycle:



Before buying | Choosing the right food parcel | During use | End of life | Alternatives

1. Before buying

Sustainable procurement starts with a clear assessment of needs. The following questions can guide procurement policies and decisions.

Do we buy the right quantities?	Can we buy locally & sustainably?	Can labels guide sustainable sourcing?
• Order and distribute quantities based on household size, nutritional needs, and duration of assistance. • Can rations be adapted to reduce food waste while meeting nutritional requirements?	• Consider reducing meat and fish, depending on nutritional needs and local culture. • Evaluate replacing rice with less carbon-emitting cereals (bulgur, freekeh, sorghum). • A market assessment may be needed to understand local dry food production and transformation. • Consult national authorities on food safety standards and certifications. *If no local supplier meets these criteria, consider regional suppliers for alternative sourcing options.*	• Labels can indicate sustainable production but not guarantee quality or fairness. • Labels often involve a fee, which can exclude smaller producers.

2. Choosing the right food parcel

These tables help integrate sustainability into your food parcel procurement. **Table 1** includes ready-to-use technical specifications for BOQs, and **Table 2** provides supplier evaluation criteria for procurement assessment. The "Impact" column reflects each criterion's importance to the environmental footprint (climate, water, waste).

Table 1. Criteria for sustainable food parcel procurement

Criteria	Impact	Sustainability guidance
Where feasible, reduce meat and fish content and replace with plant-based proteins	High	Beef and lamb have by far the highest environmental impacts per kilo and per g of proteins provided. Where possible, replace with pulses such as lentils, chickpeas and beans, which have a much lower environmental impact.
Agroecological & sustainable farming practices	High	Smallholder agroecological farming practices, with no or very limited, clearly monitored use of chemical pesticides, and no GMOs.
Where feasible, replace rice with alternative cereals	Medium	Rice cultivation in flooded paddies releases significant amounts of methane, giving rice a higher climate impact than most other cereals. Replace with alternatives such as bulgur, sorghum, millet, freekeh that often can also be sourced locally.
Canned fish	Medium	Locally sourced or, failing that, certified. Examples of international sustainability labels for fisheries and aquaculture: • Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) • Aquaculture Stewardship Council
Food products (Coffee, tea, etc.)	Medium	Fair Trade-Certified Products. Examples of international Fair-Trade labels: • Fair for life • Naturland Fair • World Fair Trade Organisation • Fairtrade (Max Havelaar) • Fair Trade USA • Ecocert • Rainforest Alliance
Expiry date	Medium	Best-before date of more than 2 years for canned and dried foods.
Reducing chemical additives	Medium	Canned foods with reduced added sugar, salt, flavour enhancers, additives, colourings, and preservatives, limiting the environmental impact of chemical production.
Origin of ingredients	Low	Locally and sustainably produced food, including canned food.

Reusable / Recyclable packaging	Low	A glass container with a screw-on metal lid, or a metal container. Avoid or limit the use of plastic containers; if this is not possible, use plastic containers that are free from bisphenol A (BPA).

Table 2. Supplier criteria

Criteria	Impact	Sustainability guidance
Storage condition and food waste	High	The supplier shall have a logistics system with stock monitoring and adequate stock levels in place to prevent losses.
Food production cooperative partnership agreement	Medium	Cooperative partnership agreement: The supplier shall provide a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) or partnership agreement demonstrating that it operates as, or collaborates with, local agricultural cooperatives.
Packaging	Low	The supplier shall propose alternatives to plastic packaging without compromising food safety and preservation.
Hygiene and safety procedures		The supplier shall demonstrate hygiene measures covering food storage and preservation, food handling, staff hygiene, cleanliness of premises and equipment, separation of clean and dirty areas, waste management, and regular hygiene checks.
Social impact		The supplier shall demonstrate local employment, fair wages, and safe working conditions.

3. During use

- Store parcels in a dry, appropriate location and apply **first-in, first-out (FIFO)** stock rotation to limit losses and waste.
- Distribute parcels based on household size and needs to avoid over-supply and food waste.
- Inform beneficiaries on **proper storage** and use before the best-before date.
- Monitor and record food waste at distribution points to identify and address **recurring causes of loss**.

4. End of life

Food waste and packaging waste:

- **Recycling:** Glass and metallic packaging can be easily reusable or recyclable. Plastic waste can be recyclable in some area. Food waste can be composted.
- **Disposal:** Food packaging and food waste shall not be destroyed by open burning or street dumping. If recycling opportunities are not available ensure a proper disposal (authorized landfill…).

5. Alternatives: cost and environmental analysis

Table 3. All contexts: environmental benefits of recommended alternatives

Availability of these alternatives must be verified with local suppliers.

Alternatives	Key benefits
Replacing meat and fish at least partly with plant-based alternatives	Beef and lamb have by far the highest environmental impacts per kilo and per g of proteins provided. Where possible, replace with pulses such as lentils, chickpeas and beans, which have a much lower environmental impact.
Locally produced food from agroecological farming	Reduces transport-related emissions and supports sustainable farming practices without chemical pesticides or GMOs.
Replacing rice with alternative cereals	Rice cultivation in flooded paddies releases significant amounts of methane, giving rice a higher climate impact than most other cereals.
Reusable/recyclable packaging (glass, metal)	Reduces plastic waste and enables easier recycling or reuse compared to plastic packaging.
Fair Trade-certified products	Supports fair wages and sustainable production practices for smallholder farmers.

Table 4. Lebanon: cost and environmental analysis of available alternatives

The cost of a more **sustainable food parcel** (with 4 organic food commodities) is **49% more expensive** than standard food parcel. No assessment was performed on replacing rice with alternative commodities.

Conventional technical specification	**Sustainable technical specification**
Imported products, non-organic with 12 items: Egyptian rice, chickpeas, coarse brown bulgur, pasta, lentils, beans, canned tuna in oil, vegetable oil, fine salt, tomato paste, coarse sugar, carton box for kitting.	Local/agroecological products, glass/metal packaging. Kit composed of the same 12 items, except that 4 items would be organic: organic long grain brown rice, organic red kidney beans, Atlantic sea salt fine and organic coconut sugar coarse.

6. References and resources

This factsheet is based on a project's market assessment in Lebanon, drawing on supplier questionnaire responses, technical observations from site visits, and available guidance on sustainable products and services relevant to the Lebanese context in 2026. For more information, as well as the methodology used for price comparison, total cost of ownership, and the simplified LCA, please refer to the following document: *Appendix 1 - Price comparison & environmental analysis methodologies.*