

Policy Briefing: Tackling the **Climate Emergency** with plant-based procurement in the public sector

- We are calling on councils to **guarantee at least one plant-based food option** on every menu every day
- Plant-based food would be **available to everyone** without having to make a special request
- Encouraging plant-based diets has a range of environmental benefits, including **reduced greenhouse gas emissions**, reduced agricultural land, water usage and reforestation opportunities
- This policy would also have a positive impact on **social inclusivity and public health**
- Councils can also promote plant-based diets by **supporting plant-based businesses and raising awareness**

WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

Founded in 1944, The Vegan Society is a leading educational, advocacy and campaigning charity. We take an evidence-based approach to encourage policies that secure benefits to the environment, animals and human health.

Veganism is a way of living which seeks to exclude, as far as is possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose. Recent polling indicates that there are over 600,000 vegans in the UK and that the number is doubling every two years. Moreover, the issues that vegans care about are issues that affect all citizens, like the use and abuse of animals, climate change, and the promotion of public health.

FIRST STEP

Thank you for being among the first councils to acknowledge the climate emergency. We need to act immediately, if we are to avert catastrophic global temperature increases and ecosystem breakdown.

PLANT-BASED DIETS

Plant-based diets have huge environmental benefits over typical Western diets containing animal products. It is impossible to fix climate change without deep emissions reductions in all sectors (IPCC 2018). Animal agriculture is often overlooked in the climate change debate but considering the scale of the emissions and other negative impacts, it is vitally important.

For example, the livestock industry is responsible for more greenhouse gas emissions than all the direct emissions from global transportation.

An individual's food-related greenhouse gas emissions can be cut by up to 50% when switching to a plant-based diet (WWF 2017). This is because animal agriculture is one of the largest producers of methane, a greenhouse gas that is 25 times more potent than carbon dioxide.

Plant-based diets also require, on average, 75% less land than typical British diets (Poore & Nemecek 2018), which would protect forests from deforestation. In the Amazon rainforest, animal agriculture is responsible for up to 91% of rainforest clearance (land is used for grazing or to grow animal feed). Land released from agriculture can be used for reforestation, which is essential for carbon sequestration, to meet the 1.5C maximum global warming target in the Paris Agreement. Reforested uplands also provide animal habitats, increased biodiversity and help prevent flooding.

Plant-based diets also use 50% less water than typical British diets, putting less pressure on increasingly scarce water resources. Due to the inefficiencies inherent in animal products (only 12% of the calories fed to livestock are retained in animal products), a switch to a plant-based system would make it possible to feed an extra 3 billion people. With a rapidly expanding global population, diets will need to change to ensure that everyone has food to eat.

Last year, researchers at Oxford University concluded that eating a vegan diet could be the “single biggest way” to reduce an individual’s environmental impact. The United Nations has also urged a global move towards a meat and dairy free diet for the benefit of our planet.

PUBLIC SECTOR PROCUREMENT

Given the scale of the environmental benefits, councils seeking to take meaningful action to combat the climate emergency should look at ways to promote more plant-based eating.

There are several actions that councils can take, but one of the key ways is through the council’s procurement policies. Offering a plant-based meal as standard, every day, on every public sector menu within the council’s jurisdiction, can be a powerful way to cut greenhouse gas emissions and encourage a truly sustainable diet. In practice this means that plant-based food would be available to everyone without a special request. Local authority institutions that offer food (e.g. schools, leisure centres, gyms, council offices) would all set a great example of what a sustainable diet looks like.

WIDER BENEFITS

As well as being more sustainable, increasing plant-based eating has several other benefits for society. Plant-based diets are typically high in fruit and vegetables, meaning less saturated fat and plenty of dietary fibre. The British Dietetic Association and the NHS recognise that totally plant-based diets are suitable for every age and life stage. Additionally, research has linked plant-based diets with lower blood pressure, cholesterol, lower rates of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some types of cancer. Building familiarity with plant-based food in public sector settings could help address many of the diet-related public health crises affecting the UK and putting strain on the NHS.

Plant-based food is also inclusive and can be enjoyed by almost everyone, including vegans, vegetarians, and those looking to reduce their animal product consumption for health or environmental reasons. Vegan dishes are normally suitable for people with religious dietary requirements as well, including people who follow the Islamic, Jewish, Sikh or Hindu faiths.

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OTHER ACTIONS COUNCILS CAN TAKE

- Build support locally by **encouraging other institutions to follow your example** and offer plant-based food on every menu. This could include universities, hospitals, non-local authority schools, businesses etc.
- **Publicly state your support for plant-based food in the public sector**, showing leadership and vision
- **Run an awareness campaign** for residents, stressing the importance diet has on climate change and health, whilst promoting the benefits of a plant-based diet. Our **Plate Up for the Planet** campaign could form the basis for the awareness campaign
- Consider creating a **toolkit for residents** and businesses with actions to tackle the climate emergency, including the importance of the switch to a plant-based diet and agricultural system
- Encourage plant-based businesses, start-ups and entrepreneurs in your area through **rate-relief measures**
- **Support and encourage** vegan/plant-based fairs and festivals, cafes and fruit & veg markets
- **Pay a Real Living Wage**, and make it Council policy that all council-funded workers receive a Real Living Wage. This ensures people are able to buy climate-friendly food.

SUMMARY

A whole host of measures will need to be implemented across society if we are to meet our obligations and tackle the climate emergency effectively. A simple, yet effective measure that all councils can take is to **guarantee at least one plant-based option on every menu** within the council’s jurisdiction. Councils can also promote plant-based diets in a variety of ways. Adopting these measures should be a key part of any meaningful action plan to tackle the climate emergency.

We would love the opportunity to meet with you to discuss these policies in more detail. You can get in touch with us to arrange a meeting using the contact details below. As an evidence-based organisation, we are always happy to provide you with facts, data, and briefings.

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