THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES

Serve more plants for the planet

Serving more plant-based foods can help you reach your sustainability goals.

PHOTO BY: JP BONNELLY

The demand for sustainable foods

The demand for more sustainable practices and products is increasing drastically and consumers are shifting their purchases in clothing, products, services, and food to align with their values. By serving more plant-based foods, you can help meet your customers' demand.

- According to Pew Research Center, 41% of Americans are eating less meat for environmental reasons.
- In one survey conducted by the International Food Information Council, 47% of respondents believed the plant-based alternative was better for the environment than the animal-based counterpart.
- Over 62% of Americans expressed that the environment should be a top priority in our society and that we are not currently doing enough.
- According to a survey conducted by Innova Market Insights, 87% of consumers are concerned about sustainably produced food.
- According to a Reuters/Ipsos poll, 57% of U.S. adults think global warming is caused by humane activity and 69% percent want the U.S. to work with other nations to curb climate change.

Local food

Information from Our World in Data shows that the transportation of our food contributes only a small percentage of GHG emissions. For most foods, 80% of GHG emissions result from land use and farming. Additionally, their research shows that beef, lamb, and cheese produce the most GHG emissions while fruits, peas, and soymilk produce drastically fewer GHG emissions. So, while serving more local food is a great step in reducing your GHG emissions, you could reduce your GHG emissions significantly more by serving more plant-based foods.

Greenhouse gasses

A greenhouse gas (GHG) is a naturally occurring gas that absorbs and emits heat. The most common greenhouse gases are carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide, methane and ozone. At natural levels these gases are no threat to our planet but, as human use of fossil fuels increases, more gas is being released into the atmosphere. Factory farms – where 99% of our meat, dairy, eggs come from - are one of the top emitters of these harmful GHGs.

Close to 70 billion farm animals are raised every year in the world for meat, eggs and dairy. As a result, the animal agriculture business is responsible for 18% of human GHG emissions.

Methane is 30% more powerful at trapping heat than CO_2 and the animal agriculture industry is the largest producer of methane in the United States. The high GHG emissions come from things such as high energy feed needed to raise the animals, processing of products, transporting products, deforestation, desertification and more.

As greenhouse gases collect in the atmosphere, they create a heat trap known as the greenhouse effect. A good way to picture this effect is to visualize the gases acting like a warm blanket around the whole planet. At first this might not cause much harm, but over time the earth will get warmer without being able to take the blanket of gases off. This causes an increase in average global temperatures and disrupts fragile ecosystems.

According to a study done by Nature, reducing our consumption of animal products is the most effective and impactful way to reduce human emissions of GHGs.

The impact of animal verses plant-based foods

Serving more plant-based foods at your dining operation is a simple and delicious way to make a big impact on the environment.

- A study conducted by the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology found that the production of plant-based meats produced 10 times fewer GHG emissions than the equivalent animal product.
- The World Resource Institute's Protein Scorecard shows that meat and dairy are generally more resource-intensive than plant-based foods. Wheat, corn and legumes have the lowest GHG emissions per gram of protein and dairy, beef, lamb, and goat have the highest GHG emissions per gram of protein.
- Our World In Data compared the GHG emissions of different high protein foods and found that the footprint of beef was 25 times greater than the footprint of tofu and 50 times greater than the footprint of beans per 100 grams of protein.

How others are making a difference

- Universities including Vanderbilt University, the College of the Holy Cross, and the University of North Texas have committed to serving less red meat, less often.
- UCLA participates in Meatless Mondays, Beef-less Thursdays, and The Impossible Foodprint Project. Additionally, they indicate low-carbon footprint menu items with a green earth symbol.
- Columbia University was recognized in the 2019 Sustainable Campus Index in part by providing a wide range of daily vegan and vegetarian options.
- Sodexo USA has increased plant-based menus to reduce the environmental impact of food offerings.

How your institution can make a difference

By working in the food service industry, you have an opportunity to make a large and lasting impact on the environment. Let's quickly do some math.

In just one day, an individual can save the following resources by eating a plant-based diet:

- 45 pounds of grain
- 30 square feet of forested land
- 1,100 gallons of water

Now, let's say your dining hall decides to increase the plant-based options you serve and in one day, you serve 1,000 plant-based meals. That would mean that you would save:

- 45,000 pounds of grain
- 30,000 square feet of forested land
- 1,100,000 gallons of water

All of the benefits of individual plant-based eating could be multiplied by the thousands. Institutions across the nation are aligning with public demand and pledging to build a better world for tomorrow by incorporating plant-based dishes onto their menus. Are you?

PHOTO BY: THE HSUS

Plant-based foods protect our resources

Land is an important and shrinking natural resource on our planet. Over 40% of land in the U.S. is used for animal agriculture. Worldwide, animal agriculture accounts for 77% of global farming land. However, it only contributes to 18% of the world's calories and only 37% of the world's protein.

The environmental toll animal products have on our water supply is devastating. Although the Earth is over 70% water, only 3% of that water is fresh water and less than 1% is available for living organisms to utilize.

- In order to produce one gram of animal protein, it takes over 100 times more water than it does to produce one gram of grain protein.
- The amount of water it takes to produce one average size beef burger is equivalent to taking 30 five-minute showers.
- Studies show that vegetarian diets can cut our water footprint down by over 50%.

Imagine how much water your institution could save by offering more plant-based menu items.

Find out more information by visiting *forwardfood.org.*

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