

Serve Plants to Save the Planet

[Guest Contributor](#)

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By Jennifer Molidor, PhD

Climate change, habitat loss and [pollution](#) are overwhelming our planet. Thankfully, these enormous threats are being met by a bold new wave of environmental activism.

But there's one place where our movement hasn't brought mass extinction and the [climate crisis](#) to the table: The literal tables at environmental events — from local board meetings to international conferences where meat-centered menus are still the norm.

With holiday parties rapidly approaching, now is the time for environmental groups to walk the talk by adopting Earth-friendly menus for their events.

The global scientific community agrees that we must reduce meat and [dairy](#) production to tackle the most pressing environmental disasters of our time. To do that, we have to change what we eat. Plant-forward changes and significant meat and dairy reduction must begin with the meals served at environmentally focused events.

The catering industry is no small potatoes. Catering sales in the U.S. are worth more than \$11 billion each year. Over the past three years, the industry has grown by nearly 8 percent annually. Changing event menus can make a big difference in reducing the environmental impact of U.S. food production and shifting the way people think about food.

For every 100 people at a holiday party or event, a plant-based menu can save more than a ton of greenhouse gas emissions, nearly an acre of habitat and 13,000 gallons of water. Those benefits are tallied up in [Catering to the Climate: How Earth-friendly Menus at Events Can Help Save the Planet](#), a new report by the Center for Biological Diversity, where I work.

Making this catering shift can bring other environmental savings. For example, those plant-based choices can [eliminate two tons of manure](#) and the toxic byproducts of improperly contained manure that contaminate public waterways and lands. In fact, the manure footprint of most animal-based dishes is greater than the actual weight of the

food served. On the other hand, dishes free of animal products have no manure footprint.

Catering to the Climate found that planet-friendly menus are a hugely effective way to fight the climate crisis. Each person who selects plant-based dishes at a day-long event cuts as much greenhouse pollution as would be emitted by 41 miles of driving, powering the average home for one day or charging [2,100 smart phones](#).

In addition, that one person's low-impact meal choices would spare more than 400 square feet of farmland, prevent about 100 pounds of manure pollution and save 250 gallons of water.

When an event planner multiplies that across their entire guest list by serving plant-based dishes as the default, the environmental savings are substantial. A low-impact menu can reduce carbon emissions by as much as 85 percent, water by 72 percent and land use by 93 percent, in addition to nearly eliminating manure pollution.

Menus that focus on plant-based dishes aren't just virtuous — they're also trending. People are increasingly seeking foods that are healthier for them and the planet. And for environmental events, serving plant-based meals sends a message that connects the movement with its own values and actions.

As we celebrate progress made in 2019 and start planning out a new year, environmental event planners should cater to the climate with delicious menus that honor the work we're doing and support a sustainable food system.