

# Plant-based Menus Help Events Cut Greenhouse Gases, Study Says

A new study from the Center for Biological Diversity shows how plant-based event menus can cut carbon emissions and conserve water.

[Special Events Staff](#) | Dec 05, 2019

Replacing meat-heavy menu selections with “earth-friendly,” plant-based options can reduce the carbon footprint of a 500-person event such as a conference or large wedding by 10 tons of greenhouse gas equivalents, according to an analysis released yesterday by the [Center for Biological Diversity](#).

The center’s report, [Catering to the Climate](#), evaluated the environmental impact of common event menus as well as plant-based alternatives. The results show that offering low-impact menus for 500 attendees can save five acres of habitat from animal agriculture, avoid greenhouse emissions equivalent to those created by driving a car 22,000 miles, prevent 17 tons of manure pollution, and conserve nearly 100,000 gallons of water from irrigation and food processing.

**CLIMATE CHOICES** “Avoiding meat-heavy menus at holiday parties and conferences can make a surprisingly big difference for our planet,” said Jennifer Molitor, senior food campaigner at the center and one of the report’s authors. “With earth-friendly catering that focuses on low-carbon, plant-based choices, we can save wildlife habitat and avoid a lot of climate pollution.”

Food production is a major contributor to the climate and extinction crises. It accounts for up to 30 percent of greenhouse gas emissions, with nearly half of that coming from meat and dairy production, according to the center.

In the United States, 80 percent of agricultural land is used for raising animals and feed crops, while half of consumed water goes toward meat production. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the world cannot meet its climate goals without significantly reducing meat consumption and the emissions associated with animal agriculture.

**WHAT WORKS, WHAT DOESN’T** Between June and October 2019, the center surveyed 25 event planners and venues to determine obstacles and opportunities to implementing earth-friendly, low-impact menus. The poll asked which option they would prefer when working with venues and caterers: an entirely plant-based menu at every meal served; a “default-veg” menu (a plant-based menu with the option for attendees to opt in for a meat or dairy item); or doubling (and improving) the amounts of plant-based options available, including non-dairy milks and cheeses.

**Planner preferences for plant-based menus:**  
Default vegetarian menu .....44 percent  
Full plant-based menu .....39 percent  
Doubling plant-based foods on current menus ... 17 percent

**As to the biggest obstacles planners face in serving plant-based menus at events:**  
Attendee expectations/response.....37 percent  
Availability of food .....21 percent  
Venue limitations .....19 percent  
Donor/Board objections .....4 percent  
Extra cost ..... 2 percent

The report also recommends solutions to some of the problems facing event organizers as they shift to greener menus.

“Public demand for plant-based, low-carbon menus is growing quickly,” Molitor said. “Even small changes in purchasing, like replacing dairy with plant-based milks and cheeses, can bring substantial benefits to suppliers and their clients. When the event and catering industry serves plant-based menus, it’s an environmental and culinary success.”