



May 5, 2021

Jennifer Armer, Senior Planner
Community Development Project
Town of Los Gatos
Via JArmer@losgatosca.gov

Dear Ms. Armer,

On behalf of the Center for Biological Diversity and our California members, I thank you for considering food sustainability initiatives and emissions strategies in the Los Gatos General Plan. The Center strongly **supports** these actions.

The Center for Biological Diversity is a national conservation nonprofit with nearly 2 million members and supporters. Our expertise is grounded in a staff of scientists and legal experts tackling crucial issues like climate change and effective mitigation strategies. Food emissions are a substantial part of global and national human-induced greenhouse gas emissions.

Studies show we cannot meet climate mitigation targets without tackling emissions from the food and agriculture sector, and namely by shifting diets toward lower emissions foods. The agriculture sector accounts for as much as [37%](#)¹ of global greenhouse gas emissions. Food procurement is an important opportunity to reduce consumption-driven emissions.

Most emissions come from only a few types of foods. The foods with the highest emissions are [meat and dairy](#) products,² which are responsible for approximately half of all food-related emissions and [16%](#)³⁴ of global greenhouse gases. The overproduction (and consumption) of meat and dairy come with a high cost to the [climate](#),⁵ as well as to [water](#)⁶, [land](#)⁷, and [biodiversity](#)⁸. Tracking institutional food purchases and shifting toward climate-friendly foods is a crucial climate solution that also has health and other environmental benefits.

Unfortunately, some sustainability initiatives overlook the need to address overproduction of animal-based foods in their commitments. Instead, municipal plans should build on frameworks of supporting

¹ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2019). Special Report on Climate Change and Land Use. <https://www.ipcc.ch/srccl/>.

² Our World in Data (2020). Environmental Impacts of Food Production. <https://ourworldindata.org/food-choice-vs-eating-local>.

³ Calculated using the 2017 online update to the FAO 2013 GLEAM assessment that estimates the livestock sector emitted 8.1 GT CO₂eq in 2010 (using 298 and 34 as global warming potentials for N₂O and CH₄, based on the IPCC 2014 report). The IPCC 2014 report estimates total anthropogenic GHG emissions in 2010 of 49 GT CO₂eq. See: FAO, Global Livestock Environmental Assessment Model (GLEAM) [online], Rome, www.fao.org/gleam/en/ and IPCC [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change], Climate Change 2014: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, [Core Writing Team, R.K. Pachauri & L.A. Meyer (eds.)], IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland (2014), http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/syr/SYR_AR5_FINAL_full_wcover.pdf.

⁴ Gerber, P. J., Steinfeld, H., Henderson, B., Mottet, A., Opio, C., Dijkman, J., ... & Tempio, G. (2013). Tackling climate change through livestock: a global assessment of emissions and mitigation opportunities. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). <http://www.fao.org/3/i3437e/i3437e.pdf>.

⁵ University of Michigan. Center for Sustainable Systems (2017). Carbon Footprint Factsheet. http://css.umich.edu/sites/default/files/Carbon%20Footprint_CSS09-05_e2020_0.pdf.

⁶ Water Footprint Network (2021). Water Footprint of Crop and Animal Products: A Comparison. <https://waterfootprint.org/en/water-footprint/product-water-footprint/water-footprint-crop-and-animal-products/>.

⁷ Carbon Brief (2021). Interactive: What is the Climate Footprint of Eating Meat and Dairy? CarbonBrief.org. <https://interactive.carbonbrief.org/what-is-the-climate-impact-of-eating-meat-and-dairy/>.

⁸ Center for Biological Diversity (2021). Extinction Facts. TakeExtinctionOffYourPlate.com.

environmental goals through procurement, in line with similar efforts regarding recycled and sustainable products and local food. Food procurement has [a significant impact](#)⁹ on the environment and overall municipal emissions and can often be addressed by resolution or executive directive requiring government food purchases to meet specific guidelines.

Making a moderate shift toward climate-friendly menus can make a big difference in advancing sustainability goals, particularly emissions targets. The [2018 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#)¹⁰ affirmed we have only a decade left to avoid irreversible climate damage. This fact has driven municipalities to include meat and dairy reductions as key factors in emissions reductions and sustainability policies, including the initiatives recommended to add to the Los Gatos General Plan.

For example, Los Angeles, California recently joined the [C-40 cities](#) initiative; and Santa Monica, CA integrated [food procurement commitments](#) into their Climate Action Plan and committed to a 15% reduction of meat and dairy procurement to meet its emissions targets; Carrboro, North Carolina has set [food emissions targets](#) in their Climate Action Plan and set a goal to reduce emissions from consumption by 50% by 2025; Denver, CO found emissions from [food procurement](#) accounted for 14% of overall emissions, nearly equal to emissions from residential energy and gasoline-powered vehicles.

Reducing beef procurement – if replaced with plant-based foods - would immediately help reduce the city’s emissions as beef emits more greenhouse gases than any other food.¹¹ Beef is also a [particularly water-intensive process](#) that depletes vital watersheds, from the Colorado River to local waterways.¹² Thus, reducing beef procurement also supports water conservation goals. Given California’s drought, wildfires and extreme weather, municipalities must do what they can to support water-saving efforts.

Cities and townships must strive to mitigate the emissions associated with municipal operations. Increasing support for local produce growers will also improve engagement with farmers markets and local food hubs, bringing economic benefits to your community. Similarly, increasing access to healthy, climate-friendly foods with city-supported neighborhood-based community gardens bring equitable solutions for those who lack access to healthy, sustainable foods.

Sustainable food policies can [increase climate resilience, help eradicate poverty](#)¹³, improve public health and equity, and [protect biodiversity](#).¹⁴ The urgency of these issues and the health of the planet demand action to transform unsustainable food systems.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Molidor, Ph.D.
Senior Food Campaigner
Center for Biological Diversity
BiologicalDiversity.org
jmolidor@biologicaldiversity.org

⁹ United Nation System Standing Committee on Nutrition (2017). Sustainable Diets for Healthy People and a Healthy Planet. <https://www.unscn.org/uploads/web/news/document/Climate-Nutrition-Paper-EN-WEB.pdf>.

¹⁰ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2018). Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5c. <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>.

¹¹ Our World in Data (2020). Environmental Impacts of Food Production. <https://ourworldindata.org/food-choice-vs-eating-local>.

¹² Richter, B. (2020). Water Sustainability and Fish Impairment Driven by Beef Production. *Nature Sustainability*. <https://www.fs.usda.gov/treearch/pubs/59918>.

¹³ Smith, P. (2012). “Climate Change and Sustainable Food Production.” Cambridge University Press. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/proceedings-of-the-nutrition-society/article/climate-change-and-sustainable-food-production/DE02043AE462DF7F91D88FD4349D38E7>.

¹⁴ Food and Agriculture Organization (2010). Sustainable Diets and Biodiversity. <http://www.fao.org/3/i3004e/i3004e.pdf>.