Plant-Based NGO Network

Better Food Foundation · Center for Biological Diversity · GBD Greener by Default · Mercy For Animals · Plant Based Treaty

Local Plant-Based Food Policies

Template Language and Examples







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I. Introduction

Many local governments want to reduce their climate footprints but don't realize one of the easiest and most effective ways to do so is to implement a **plant-based food policy**. These policies commit to procuring and providing sustainable food that is optimal for the climate, the natural environment, biodiversity, and human health.

This resource offers **template policy language** and **examples** of some of the best types of plant-based policies that municipalities can enact. They are organized into four general categories: serving and events policies, procurement policies, tracking and reporting policies, and community engagement policies.

The template language provided can be adapted or copied and pasted directly into local policies — such as **motions, resolutions, ordinances,** or **proclamations** passed by a legislative body; **executive orders**; or agency-developed **strategic plans** or **guidelines** (e.g., Climate Action Plans and Food Plans). Policymakers may — and are strongly encouraged to — implement multiple policies within the same municipality or combine them into a single policy with multiple components. For example, a city can both pass a plant-based by default policy for city events and implement a strategy to track its food-related greenhouse gas emissions. At the end of this document is a list of additional resources that local policymakers can use to successfully implement plant-based policies.

Did you know? Municipalities account for 70% of global GHG emissions.[1] Food is the largest source of consumption-based emissions in cities, at 13%-20%, with the vast majority of those emissions coming from animal products.[2] By the year 2050, 80% of all food will be consumed in cities[3] and GHGs from the food sector will have increased 38%.[4] Meanwhile animal-based foods account for 16.5% of global GHGs[5] and produce twice as many GHG emissions as plant-based foods,[6] despite accounting for a mere 5% of all calories consumed.[7] Cities, no matter how much or how little food they procure, can demonstrate their commitment to environmental sustainability, public health, fiscal responsibility, and inclusivity by implementing plant-based food policies.

What is "plant-based"? Policies should clearly define **"plant-based"** as "containing no products or ingredients derived from or produced by animals, including meat, poultry, fish, dairy, eggs, lard, gelatin, or honey." This differs from **"plant-rich," "plant-centered,"** and **"plant-forward,"** which are often used interchangeably to describe diets that focus primarily on foods from

plants but may still allow small amounts of animal products. Although some policymakers prefer these terms because they allow for more nuance and breadth, “plant-based” provides the most clarity for those implementing policies and is the most inclusive for constituents who may have medical, religious, or ethical dietary concerns.

II. Events Policies

Events policies dictate the food and beverages that can be served at events within the municipality, whether hosted directly by the city or by permitted organizers.

a. Plant-Based Defaults at City-Sponsored Events

All food and beverages at city-sponsored, city-planned, or city-hosted events are served plant-based by default. This means that exclusively plant-based foods and beverages are served as the primary option, but attendees may request an animal-based option if they desire. This requires an additional request from the guest to receive animal-based food or beverage items or a meal rather than requiring people who desire plant-based options to request the removal of animal-based ingredients.

Benefits: This simple shift normalizes plant-based food at events, and it’s easy to implement since it’s building off existing menus. Behavioral science proves that making plant-based foods the default option is extremely effective at increasing consumption of those foods — and making menus more inclusive — while still offering animal products to those who want them, maintaining satisfaction for all event attendees. One study found that making vegetarian meals the default at a lunch event increased the vegetarian choice by as much as 89%,[8] while another found that it decreased the selection of a meat option by as much as 56%.[9]

Recommended for: All cities and municipalities that host and serve food at events of any size, from small catered departmental meetings to large public festivals.

Sample Policy Language:

This policy shall apply to all city-sponsored events and meetings in which the city provides food and beverages to attendees. This policy does not apply to cosponsored events held in the city.

For city-sponsored events and meetings, the city commits to serving plant-based food and beverages as the default, giving attendees the choice to opt in to items with animal products.

To ensure adherence with this policy, city staff shall ensure that plant-based foods are presented at the beginning of menus and buffet lines; use plant-based options as the standard for beverages; and provide educational information, such as signage in food-serving areas with the title and description of the plant-based food and beverage offered, to engage and educate attendees.

Real-World Examples:

Austin, TX (2024): Austin/Travis County Food Plan

- The city of Austin's Office of Sustainability adopted a practice of ordering plant-based menus as the default for all office meetings and events where food is served (p. 17).

Denver, CO (2023): A Proclamation Celebrating CASR on Their Adoption of an Equitable and Sustainable Catering Policy

- This proclamation requires all events hosted by the Office of Climate Action, Sustainability, and Resiliency (CASR) to serve plant-based meals by default.

West Hollywood, CA (2024): A resolution of the city council of the city of West Hollywood establishing a policy to require sustainable and climate-friendly food choices for city-sponsored events

- This resolution requires all city-sponsored events to serve plant-based foods and beverages by default.

Sammamish, WA (2025): A resolution of the city of Sammamish City Council supporting an equitable and sustainable catering policy for city-provided meals at public meetings and events

- This resolution requires all public meetings and events at which the city provides food to serve plant-based food and beverages by default.

New York, NY (2022): NYC Health + Hospitals Plant-Based Meal Program

- New York City demonstrated how these policies can reach beyond events to other areas under the city's jurisdiction by instituting a plant-based default policy for all meals served at its 11 public hospitals in 2022, which resulted in a 36% decrease in food-related emissions after one year.

b. 2:1 Plant-Based Ratios

Event organizers hosting permitted events within the municipality are either required or strongly encouraged to serve a 2:1 plant-based ratio, meaning that two-thirds (67%) of all foods and beverages served are plant-based. This may be incorporated into a guideline that the city shares with every event organizer upon the submission or approval of their event permit applications. This policy should accompany, rather than replace, the previous plant-based default events policy, if in place.

Benefits: Offering a greater variety of plant-based choices increases options and tends to lead diners to select more plant-based dishes and fewer meat dishes. One study found that increasing the proportion of meat-free meal options available for purchase in a cafeteria from 1:2 to 2:1 led to a 20% decrease in the number of meat options sold, while increasing meat-free options from 50% to 75% increased the odds of their purchase by nearly 2.5 times.[10]

Recommended for: All cities and municipalities that provide permits for events hosted within the city borders.

Sample Policy Language:

The city [requires/strongly encourages] the event organizer to serve a 2:1 ratio of plant-based to animal-based foods and beverages (at least two-thirds, or 67%, of all food and beverages offered are plant-based) if the event includes meals or beverages.

Real-World Examples:

Denver, CO (2023): A Proclamation Celebrating CASR on Their Adoption of an Equitable and Sustainable Catering Policy

- Under this policy, in addition to plant-based defaults, the agency is also directed to “offer at least two plant-based options for every animal product option.”

III. Procurement Policies

Procurement policies dictate how the municipality purchases food overall. Municipalities or individual departments may develop their own food standards for the types of food they purchase. Plant-based procurement policies can be integrated into those food standards and the city’s food service contracts.

a. Shifting Toward More Plant-Based Food and Beverage Procurement

The municipality commits to procuring a specified increase in the number or percentage of plant-based products (or decrease in animal-based products).

Benefits: Many large cities and counties purchase an enormous amount of food, which they sell or offer through different agencies, facilities (such as public hospitals), events, and workplaces. By shifting procurement, they can dictate food policy at the implementation level in a way that aligns with their values and supports their local communities. For example, programs such as the Good Food Purchasing Program, which cities can join, offer frameworks for cities to standardize their procurement policies in a manner that addresses a multitude of food system concerns: valued workforce, sustainability, animal welfare, local economies, and health (see section VI below). Plant-based foods are also often less expensive, helping cities save money on procurement.

Recommended for: Larger cities and municipalities that regularly procure food for selling, serving, and distribution, such as through government-operated facilities, healthcare systems, parks, food banks, and nutrition services.

Sample Policy Language:

The city adopts a goal of increasing its plant-based food and beverage procurement by X% by [DATE].

Real-World Examples:

Berkeley, CA (2021): To accelerate the city of Berkeley's transition to plant-based foods

- This resolution set a goal to implement a 50% reduction in animal-based foods served by the city by 2024 and an eventual 100% shift to plant-based foods.

San Francisco County, CA (2020): Ordinance amending the Administrative Code to introduce standards and goals for food purchasing by the Department of Public Health and the Sheriff's Department in hospitals and jails

- Through the Good Food Purchasing Program, the city and county mandated a 50% reduction in the volume of animal products served in jails and a 15% reduction in hospitals, with instructions to replace them with plant-based foods.

b. Food and Nutrition Standards

The municipality creates or amends its food procurement and serving standards, which are used to dictate what food and beverages can be procured and served via both municipal departments and all food service contractors within the municipality, to require or recommend an increase in plant-based products, a decrease in animal-based products, and/or competitive signage and pricing to promote plant-based products.

Benefits: These food and nutrition standards help clarify what policies like plant-based defaults and procurement look like in practice at the foodservice level, while demonstrating the implementation of best practices that will increase widespread acceptance of menu changes. In addition to sustainability, they can also address important nutrition concerns to improve resident health. For example, the standards can prohibit the procurement and serving of processed meats, which have been associated with numerous health problems.

Recommended for: Cities and municipalities (typically ones that regularly procure food) that already have their own food/nutrition standards for food procurement or would benefit from creating such standards.

Sample Policy Language:

The city adopts the following food and nutrition standards for all foods and beverages procured and served by city departments and food service contractors:

- Entrees:
  - Require daily offerings of plant-based entrees.
  - Require/recommend a 2:1 ratio of plant-based entrees to nonplant-based entrees.
- Proteins:
  - Require at least 2 of the proteins offered daily to be plant-based proteins.
  - Require/recommend a 2:1 ratio of plant-based to animal-based proteins.
  - Require minimizing/eliminating the purchase of processed meats.
  - Require/recommend limiting the purchase of red meats, especially beef.
- Dairy:
  - Require offering plant-based dairy alternatives (e.g., almond, soy, and/or oat milk)
  - Require/recommend defaulting to plant-based dairy alternatives.

- Sauces, Dressings, Condiments & Dips:
    - Require/recommend purchasing plant-based condiments, dressings, and sauces.
    - Require/recommend defaulting to plant-based condiments, dressings, and sauces.
- Desserts:
    - Require/recommend defaulting to plant-based desserts whenever possible.
- Menu labeling:
    - Require plant-based items to be displayed at eye level in display areas.
    - Require plant-based items to be denoted using a symbol, such as (v), rather than in the name of the dish, and keep them in the same part of the menu as the meat options rather than separate.
- Pricing:
    - Recommend pricing for plant-based entrees, sides, snacks/desserts, and beverages to remain competitive with comparable options.

Real-World Examples:

Los Angeles County, CA (2025): Standards for Prepared Foods, Snacks, and Beverages

- The county's food standards, which apply to all foods, beverages, and snacks served across its departments and food service contracts, require a certain number of plant-based entrees, proteins, dairy alternatives, and other options to be served and prioritized.

New York, NY (2022): New York City Food Standards: Meals and Snacks Purchased and Served

- The city's food standards, which apply to all foods and beverages purchased and meals and snacks served by city agencies and their contractors, require two or more servings of plant proteins at lunch and dinner per week, recommend that a plant protein option is available at all meals, limit the amount of beef and ruminant meats and cheese served, and ban the serving of processed meats.

Philadelphia, PA (2022): Nutrition Standards and Implementation Guide

- The city's nutrition standards, which provide guidance for all meals purchased, served, sold, or prepared through city-funded programming, require that at least one plant-based entrée be served for lunch and dinner per week.

IV. Food Emissions Policies

These policies focus on the measurable climate impacts of food production, namely GHG emissions. They often seek to calculate a municipality's total food-related emissions to establish a baseline for setting targets, such as reducing those emissions by a certain percentage below that baseline.

a. Food-Related Emissions Tracking and Inventory

The municipality establishes a plan to measure its GHG emissions related to food consumption, creating a baseline metric to track progress in reducing emissions. It may set up a GHG inventory to visualize and publicize this progress.

Benefits: Measuring and tracking food emissions enables better overall management while helping create accountability and provide data for cities to prove that their efforts are working.

Recommended for: Any cities and municipalities that want to gain a better understanding of their food-related climate impacts and work to reduce those impacts.

Sample Policy Language:

The city directs [AGENCY/DEPARTMENT] to collect and calculate the city's annual food-related emissions, based on the total amount of food purchased, served, or distributed by city departments, including city vendors, and to establish a baseline. Using the established baseline, the [AGENCY/DEPARTMENT] shall create food-related emissions and impact reduction targets for [TIMEFRAME], continue to track annual food-related emissions to monitor progress toward those goals, and publicly report this data in an online database.

Real-World Examples:

Campbell, CA (2026): City of Campbell Climate Action and Adaptation Plan

- The city established a consumption-based inventory that includes tracking of food-related emissions (p. 30).

Los Angeles County, CA (2025): Expanding county action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through food procurement

- This motion directed several agencies to collect annual food-purchasing data, establish a baseline of GHG emissions from food,

generate a public climate impact report from that data, and disseminate materials on ways to meet food-based emissions targets.

New York, NY (2022): Good Food Purchasing Data
- By executive order, the city established a Good Food Purchasing Program that requires tracking and publishing of the city's food procurement data, including GHG emissions by food type.

Portland and Multnomah County, OR (2015): Climate Action Plan
- The county assessed and tracked its consumption-based emissions, including food, in its Climate Action Plan under *Consumption-Based Emissions* (p. 36).

San Francisco, CA (2022): Consumption-Based Emissions Inventory Report
- The city created a consumption-based emissions inventory that tracks food-related emissions annually.

b. Food-Related Emissions Reduction Goal

The municipality sets a goal, via city policies, for a reduction in the number of food-related GHG emissions it will produce.

Benefits: Setting a food-emissions reduction goal helps cities create a pathway for success and showcase a tangible accomplishment when they achieve it.

Recommended for: Any cities and municipalities that want to reduce their food-related GHG emissions; cities that procure a larger amount of food will see the greatest impact.

Sample Policy Language:

The city shall reduce its overall greenhouse gas emissions associated with food and beverages purchased and served by city departments, facilities, and contractors by X% by [DATE] by increasing its procurement of plant-based foods and reduce its procurement of animal-based foods.

Real-World Examples:

Austin, TX (2021): Austin Climate Equity Plan
- Under *Food and Product Consumption*, Goal 1 includes "promotes plant-based foods," while Goal 2 is to reduce GHG emissions from institutional, commercial, and government purchasing, including food, by 50% by 2030 (pp. 71-74).

Carrboro, NC (2017): Community Climate Action Plan

- The section *Food Choice Measures* focuses on reducing the city's emissions from food choices by promoting climate-friendly diets and sets a goal of reducing GHGs from diets by 50%, with a focus on emissions from meat, dairy, and eggs. It recommends that the city develop data and methods to better measure diet-related GHGs and to monitor progress toward the reduction goal (p. 52).

Los Angeles County, CA (2025): Joining the "Coolfood Pledge" to Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Los Angeles County Food Systems

- Through the CoolFood Pledge (see section VI below), the county set a goal to reduce its food-related GHG emissions by 25% by 2035.

New York, NY (2025): NYC Food and Climate Strategy

- The city set a goal to reduce GHG emissions from city agency food procurement by 30% by 2030 (p. 16).

Prince George's County, MD (2022): Climate Action Plan

- Under *Priority Recommendation A-10: Promote a healthy food system supported by low-carbon regenerative agricultural practices*, the plan directed the county to "acknowledge the importance of shifting to more climate-friendly diets" and establish a target to reduce emissions associated with food purchasing by 25% (p. 231).

San Diego, CA (2022): City of San Diego Climate Action Plan

- Under *Strategy 4: Circular Economy and Clean Communities*, the city set a target to "reduce GHG emission and water use of total beef, pork, chicken, turkey and dairy purchases by 20%" and "increase local, healthy, sustainable foods to 20%" (p. 69).

Washington, D.C. (2021): Green Food Purchasing Amendment Act

- The district passed an act to measure the city's food-related GHGs, establish a baseline assessment, and create best practices for reducing GHGs from food procurement, culminating in a requirement that the district reduce those emissions by 35% by 2030.

V. Community Engagement Policies

These policies aim to engage the community in shifting to more plant-rich, climate-friendly diets through strategic planning by the municipal government. This can take many different forms, from educational outreach to launching programs and campaigns to collaborating with local businesses and organizations.

a. Promoting Plant-Rich / Climate-Friendly Diets

The municipality develops a plan or strategy to promote plant-rich diets among its constituents, whether through marketing, stakeholder collaboration, local incentives, or other means.

Benefits: This is a relatively easy way to get all members of the community involved in making an impact while educating them on healthier and more sustainable lifestyles, without needing formal legislation.

Recommended for: All cities and municipalities.

Sample Policy Language:

The city will support the promotion of a plant-rich diet by raising public awareness of its benefits through [STRATEGY] (e.g., education campaigns and expanding access to plant-based foods).

Real-World Examples:

Ann Arbor, MI (2020): Ann Arbor's Living Carbon Neutrality Plan

- Under *Strategy 5*, the plan includes the goal "support a plant-rich diet," which includes a vision to educate the community about the benefits of reducing meat consumption (p. 94).

Austin/Travis County, TX (2024): Austin/Travis County Food Plan

- *Goal 8: Pro-climate, Pro-Health* is to raise awareness about healthy food and reduce the overall environmental impact of the food system by conducting public information and education campaigns, identifying opportunities for partnerships to encourage plant-based menus, expanding programs that increase availability of pro-climate foods, and funding opportunities to improve the food system (pp. 60-62).

Campbell, CA (2026): City of Campbell Climate Action and Adaptation Plan

- Under *Action UE-6*, the city presented a plan to develop and implement a procurement policy that encourages the use of plant-based and other climate-smart food options (p. 55). Under *Personal Climate Action and Resilience Roadmaps*, it included consumer education on how and why to follow a more sustainable plant-based diet (pp. 81-82).

Eugene, OR (2020): Eugene's Community Climate Action Plan 2.0

- In the section *Individual Actions: Consumption and Fugitive Emissions*, the plan recommends residents "substitute plant-based foods for meat and dairy" (p. 104).

Hartford, CT (2017): Hartford Climate Action Plan

- *Goal 4* is to reduce the carbon intensity of food, and one strategy includes promoting alternatives to consumption of red meat to constituents through education and outreach (p. 37).

Los Angeles County, CA (2025): OurCounty Sustainability Plan

- Under *Strategy 10B, Goal 10: A sustainable and just food system*, Action 147 is to "promote plant-based menu options through nutrition and food procurement policies in food service settings, such as County facilities, hospitals, higher learning institutions, school districts, shelters, jails, and other food settings" (p. 166).

San Francisco, CA (2026): San Francisco's Climate Action Plan

- In the *Circular Economy section*, the plan includes a strategy to "Reduce the carbon footprint of our food system by reducing waste, promoting climate-friendly diets, and getting excess food to communities in need." This includes a goal to launch a Sustainable Food Procurement dashboard and expand it across all city departments, community organizations, and commercial kitchens by 2028 (p. 78).

Santa Monica, CA (2019): City of Santa Monica Climate Action & Adaptation Plan

- In the section *Low Carbon Food & Ecosystems*, one of the proposed actions is to "promote more sustainable food and drink options through campaigns, outreach events and community resources," including the pillar "reduce meat and dairy" (p. 56).

Seattle, WA (2013): Seattle Climate Action Plan

- In the section *What You Can Do? Eating*, the plan recommends eating less dairy and meat and considering going meat-free one day per week (p. 71).

b. Plant-Based Community Initiatives

The municipality adopts plant-based initiatives, such as Green Mondays, Meatless Mondays, Veganuary, and more, to encourage its residents and local organizations to adopt plant-based eating.

Benefits: A campaign-based initiative can bring a community together around a shared program in a fun and inviting way, while encouraging the normalization and celebration of plant-based eating. These strategies can also build community connections and increase the success of plant-based policies by giving constituents the tools they need to embrace changes in municipal venues and at home.

Recommended for: All cities and municipalities.

Sample Policy Language:

The city proclaims [DATE] to be "[INITIATIVE NAME]" and encourages its restaurants, schools, grocery stores, organizations, institutions, and citizens to join us in celebrating plant-based foods to benefit human and planetary health.

Real-World Examples:

Austin, TX (2024): Plant-Based for the Planet

- The mayor of Austin proclaimed January 2024 "Plant-Based for the Planet Month."

Dallas, TX (2020): Dallas Comprehensive Environmental and Climate Action Plan

- The plan includes an information campaign on sustainable agriculture and healthy and local foods, accompanied by the launch of a Meat-Free Mondays program that partners with local restaurants to encourage plant-based options (p. 159).

New York, NY (2024): Plant-Powered Carbon Challenge

- The mayor's office launched the Plant-Powered Carbon Challenge, which any organization with a food environment could sign on to. Signatories commit to a 25% reduction in food-based carbon emissions by 2030 by prioritizing low-carbon foods, measuring and tracking their footprints, and developing an action plan to procure more plant-based foods.

Pittsburgh, PA (2018): City of Pittsburgh Climate Action Plan Version 3.0

- Under *Objective: Support local food systems*, the plan includes a strategy to "encourage plant-rich diets" by promoting Meatless Monday and suggests that residents go beyond this to eat plant-based foods twice a week or even five days a week (pp. 66-67).

Washington, DC (2022): DC Veg Restaurant Week
- The mayor of DC proclaimed May 7-14, 2022, "DC Veg Restaurant Week," in which restaurants around the district showcased their plant-based fare.

West Hollywood, CA (2025): Veganuary
- The city adopted Veganuary, a campaign encouraging people to try plant-based eating in January, and invited the entire community to participate.

VI. Additional Commitments for Cities

The following are preexisting programs and pledges that municipalities can commit to, which set common objectives for increasing plant-based foods and decreasing animal-based foods. They serve as stepping stones for cities to set goals that they should then seek to achieve through their own internal policies. Merely signing onto these commitments is *not* enough; cities must follow up with actions around events, procurement, emissions goals, and public engagement to create measurable change.

- C40 Good Food Cities Accelerator: Cities across the globe can pledge to align food procurement with the EAT-Lancet Planetary Health Diet, support increased consumption of healthy, plant-rich foods, reduce food loss and waste by 50%, and work with community members to develop a joint strategy to achieve these goals inclusively and equitably.
- CoolFood Pledge: Municipalities (as well as organizations and businesses) can sign this pledge to reduce food-related emissions by 25% by 2030.
- Eat for Impact: Cities can participate in this program to create community-driven initiatives that introduce more plant-rich food choices to build a more sustainable food system.
- Good Food Purchasing Program: Cities can adopt the GFPP to institute values-aligned food procurement policies that create positive social and environmental outcomes.
- Plant Based Treaty: Cities can endorse this worldwide treaty to shift toward a more sustainable, plant-based food system centered on three core principles: redirect, relinquish, and restore.

VII. Additional Resources

For more information and guidance on instituting local plant-based food policies, check out these other resources:

Policy Implementation and Examples

- C40 Good Food Cities Accelerator: How cities are achieving the planetary health diet for all (C40 Cities)
- EAT-Lancet Commission Brief for Cities (EAT-Lancet Commission)
- How Cities Can Use Procurement to Shift Towards Healthy, Sustainable Diets (C40 Cities)
- Meat of the Matter: A Municipal Guide to Climate-Friendly Food Purchasing (Friends of the Earth)
- Municipal Food and Emissions Guidelines: Best Practices Recommendations (Center for Biological Diversity)
- Towards Plant-Forward Diets: A Toolkit for Local Policymakers (NYU Center for Environmental & Animal Protection and Guarini Center on Environmental, Energy & Land Use Law)

Climate-Friendly Food Actions

- A Toolkit for Incorporating Plant-Based Protein Measures in Municipal Climate Action Plans (Environmental Law Institute)
- Climate-Friendly Diets: How Cities Can Cut Emissions and Improve Public Health (NYU Guarini Center on Environmental, Energy & Land Use Law)
- Estimating Consumption-Based Greenhouse Gas Emissions at the City Scale (Stockholm Environment Institute)
- How City Food Affects the Environment: Resources for Advocates and Policymakers (Center for Biological Diversity)

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