

Earth Day toolkit



THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES

Food service and the environment

HOW THE FOOD WE EAT IMPACTS OUR PLANET

It's no secret that our actions have a lasting impact on the world around us. From the cars we drive and grocery bags we use, to the length of showers we take, our choices have consequences that go far beyond our own lives and backyards.

Nowhere is this impact more hidden, yet more crucial, than in the food on our plates.

It comes down to how our food is produced. When we look at a pound of beef in the grocery store, we might just see ground hamburger meat, but what we're not seeing are the [1,800 gallons of water](#) used to produce that pound of beef or the nearly [500 pounds of climate-warming greenhouse gases \(GHG\)](#) emitted during its production, not to mention the forests cleared and animals harmed—all for just a few burgers! When comparing a beef burger to a plant-based (beef-alternative) burger, the plant-based counterpart uses [up to 99% less water and land, emits up to 90% less greenhouse gas, and causes up to 91% less aquatic degradation](#). When comparing beef and other animal products like chicken and pork to whole-food plant-based foods like legumes, tofu, fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, the environmental difference is even more significant!

When we start to look at the big picture, we see just how large an impact even one meal has on our environment. Because of this, our country's appetite for plant-based foods is growing larger by the day, with one in five Americans looking to reduce their consumption of meat and other animal products in an effort to improve their own health as well as the health of our environment.

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VOTE WITH YOUR MENUS

This Earth Day, vote with your menus for a healthier planet by serving more plant-based options and educating your students, customers, and community about the power behind our food choices.

While many environmental issues have reached a global scale, they are perpetuated at an individual level. Food service institutions and professionals can play a large role in mitigating, if not reversing, these harmful effects by adding more plant-based options to their menus and thereby reducing the volume of animal products prepared and sold. Luckily for us, making healthier and more sustainable dietary choices doesn't mean sacrificing flavor or skipping familiar favorites, as the development of delicious plant-based products and recipes only gets better every year!

Check out the rest of our toolkit for ideas and resources about how to incorporate and celebrate plant-based food in your operations this Earth Day and how to ensure your audience is just as excited as you are. Now, will someone pass the Smokey BBQ Tofu Tri-tip Hoagies, please?

Want to go BIG this Earth Month? Take our [Forward Food Pledge](#) and announce it during Earth Week!



WAYS TO CELEBRATE EARTH DAY

Celebrating Earth Day is a fun way to connect students and customers to their food and the environment, while encouraging them to try new things and get the nutrients their bodies need!

There are a variety of ways to increase education and engagement around your new plant-based menu offerings, and we've drawn up a list of suggestions for festivities surrounding Earth Day/Week/Month. If you have a student environmental group or sustainability committee at your operations, they may want to work alongside you on this initiative!



Calendar of events

A suggested timeline for your Earth Week festivities

MONDAY

Put signs around your school (e.g., classrooms, lunchroom, and hallways) or buildings showing the connection between food and the environment and showcasing beautiful photos of healthy, plant-based food (see Earth Day marketing materials section below for examples).

TUESDAY

Sample and vote for plant-based cups, bowls, snacks, entrées and/or desserts during lunch hours (see Earth Day engagement ideas section below for examples).

WEDNESDAY

Give a shout out to Earth Day and your operation's involvement on social media (see Earth Day marketing materials section below for examples).

THURSDAY

Feature an entirely plant-based breakfast and lunch menu with signs showing the amount of greenhouse gas emissions, land, and water saved with this simple daily swap. For institutions that set a target plant-based goal with us (the percentage of your menu that you want to change to make a sustainable impact), we can help with these calculations!

FRIDAY

Bring it to the classroom! Consider short lessons about agriculture's impact on the environment, nutrition and healthy eating, or global plant-based cuisine from around the world.

Earth Day engagement ideas

For staff, students, parents, and customers

SAMPLING TABLE

Increase student or customer appreciation of and engagement with plant-based offerings by setting up a table and sampling the items the day before you plan to menu them or the day of. Let your students or customers offer immediate feedback by voting for their favorite dishes.

RECIPE DEMONSTRATION

Surprise your students or customers with a special dinner or demo event that features easy-to-make and popular plant-based items like build-your-own nachos bar, make-your-own mushroom street tacos, or a baked potato bar featuring popular toppings like black bean chili.

VOTING

Create a contest around new plant-based items and allow students and customers to vote on their favorites. This will get students, customers, and staff more enthused about and invested in these options. It is also an excellent way to inspire chefs to get excited about new dishes and potentially unfamiliar ingredients.

INVITE A GUEST

Have a plant-based guest chef at the event to get students and customers excited about plant-based food!

NAMING CONTEST

Let students or customers name the dishes! You can also select fun names after your city (e.g., Tacoma Tacos, Minneapolis Muffins, Cincinnati Crisps) or school (e.g., Bulldog Burritos, Park High Pesto Pasta, Cooper Chili).

INVITE A VENDOR

Collaborate with a plant-based vendor for an event or takeover to get students and customers excited about the new menu items. Examples of simple ingredient swaps include swapping the meat and cheese on your pizzas for plant-based pepperoni and non-dairy cheese. Or even more straightforward would be swapping out the chicken nuggets for plant-based nuggets.

RECIPE CONTEST

Have a plant-based recipe contest and invite students or customers to submit new, creative recipes. For staff, we also offer plant-based virtual product trainings, where participants can innovate exciting new recipes to roll out using some of the newest and most popular plant-based products on the market (ask us about this!).

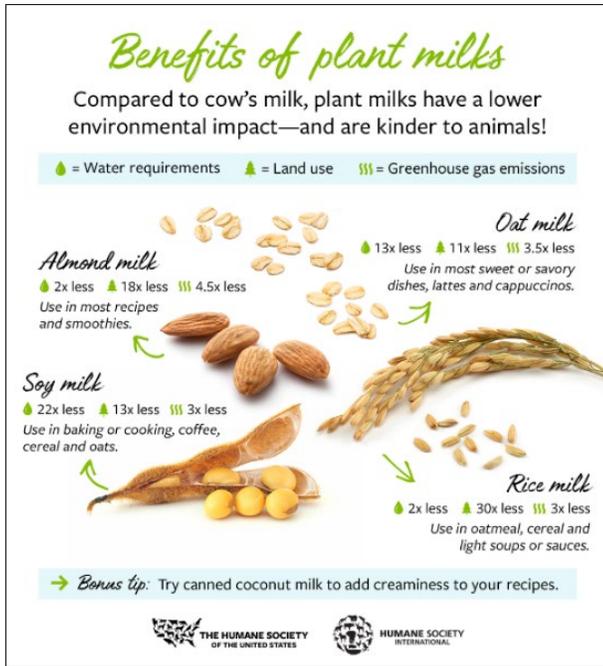
OFFER PRIZES

Offer incentives and prizes for students or customers who choose a plant-based menu item. For younger children who choose a plant-based meal, a bright-colored sticker on their meal tray or food item could enter them into a raffle. Implement a loyalty program for plant-based rollouts (e.g., when customers try new items on rollout days, they get a punch or stamp card that adds up to a free smoothie or other prize).



Earth Day marketing materials

Helpful tips for success



SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media promotion is an important aspect of promoting plant-based menu items. Plan to create your own graphics or download the provided social media graphics (sample pictured above) ahead of time and have your marketing department post them during Earth Month.

Utilize the hashtag #ForwardFood and tag @ForwardFoodCollaborative when posting.

Encourage students or customers to select a plant-based option and post about it on social media. Or, ask an active student culinary council participant or marketing intern to do an Instagram takeover for Earth Week.

You can download sample sharegraphics for Earth Month [here](#).

SIGNAGE

Posting flyers and signs around your school, campus, or building is an excellent way to highlight new plant-based menu items, increase excitement for these options, and educate students and customers on the benefits of choosing plant-based food.

Create a simple flyer for Earth Day/Week that explains the plant-based foods you're serving that week and why, and then share it with customers the week before via your newsletter, sending it home with students, and posting it around your school or building.

For institutions that have set a plant-based target with us, we have a few pre-designed fliers (like the one pictured below) that are available for free shipping.



➔ **EMAIL** the Forward Food Collaborative to place an order at forwardfood@humane.org.



Earth Day menus

How to structure your menu for maximum impact

Now, let's talk menus! Creating a week-long Earth Day menu, where meat-based entrées are swapped out for plant-based counterparts, is an easy way to create tangible impact. You can consider offering new plant-based entrées each day during Earth Week or hosting a plant-based takeover during Earth Week. We have an entire recipe database with [hundreds of free plant-based recipes](#) for you to use and, we just launched 15 new [low-waste plant-based recipes](#) that would be perfect for Earth Month!

1

SWAP PER MEAL

Swapping only 1 meat-based entrée for 1 plant-based entrée per meal equals roughly a 14% increase in plant-based options.

You can download a sample menu for 1 swap per meal [here](#).

2

SWAPS PER MEAL

Swapping 2 meat-based entrées for 2 plant-based entrées per meal equals roughly a 28% increase in plant-based options.

You can download a sample menu for 2 swaps per meal [here](#).

3

SWAPS PER MEAL

Swapping 3 meat-based entrées for 3 plant-based entrées per meal equals roughly a 43% increase in plant-based options.

You can download a sample menu for 3 swaps per meal [here](#).

Above are three examples based on a weekly menu model of seven entrée options per meal, for a total of 21 entrée options per day.



Calculating emissions savings

How to calculate your impact

GREENHOUSE GAS MENU PLANNER

For institutions that set a target plant-based goal with us, we have a simple greenhouse gas (GHG) menu planner for you to use. The planner gives you a quick and easy way to note which plant-based swaps you made on your menus. Once you complete the menu planner, you can email it back to us for calculation and analysis.

We will also translate your carbon equivalent savings into relatable real-life savings for your operations, students, and customers to celebrate!

→ **SIGN** the Forward Food Pledge to receive access to our free greenhouse gas menu planner [here](#).

SUSTAINABILITY SUCCESS STORY

In the fall of 2022, we collaborated with 49 school districts to swap two meat-based entrees for two plant-based entrees every week for one month. In total, these school districts eliminated **over 80,820 pounds of carbon equivalent emissions!**

THAT'S EQUIVALENT TO...

90,996 miles driven
17,950 trees planted
4,459,339 smartphones charged



Extending your impact

How to extend your impact past Earth Month with our free resources

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Marketing Tips and Tricks](#)

[K-12 plant-based recipes](#)

[C&U plant-based recipes](#)

[Low waste plant-based recipes](#)

[Healthcare plant-based recipes](#)

→ LEARN MORE

You can learn more about the Forward Food Pledge and sign the pledge [here](#).

FORWARD FOOD PLEDGE

Learn more about the Forward Food Pledge and how you can receive further hands-on consultation and support from our team of chefs, dietitians, and other plant-based experts to continue your impact beyond Earth Day.

One of the many great resources you can receive through our Forward Food Pledge is access to our custom plant-based culinary trainings that can help you gain buy-in from staff. These trainings can help your staff understand the reasons why serving plant-based foods is important and how they can successfully prepare and market delicious offerings that their audience will love.



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