



CHOOSEVEG

Best of Plant-Based: Coffee Shops



Who doesn't love a good latte?

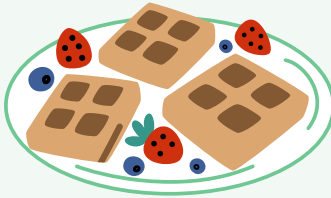
America's love affair with caffeine is going strong, with roughly 75% of Americans drinking coffee daily and 34% purchasing coffee from a coffee shop at least once a week. At the same time, an increasing portion of consumers are seeking plant-based food and beverage options, whether for health, ethical, or climate-related reasons.

This report looks at the **largest and most recognizable U.S. coffee-shop chains** and analyzes several key elements that matter most to plant-based customers:



1

Which coffee shops use plant-based milk as the default in some or all of their drinks?

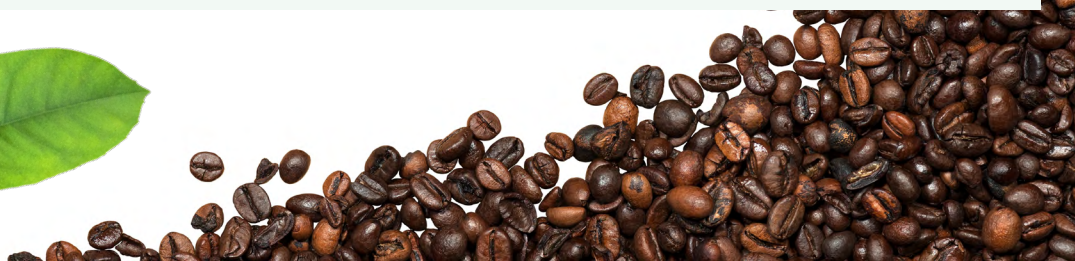


3

Which coffee shops charge a fee for using plant-based milk in drinks like lattes, cappuccinos, and macchiatos?

2

Which coffee shops have ample, delicious plant-based food options?

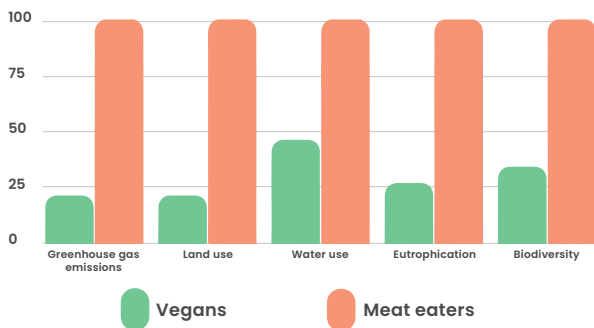




Fighting Climate Change with Plant-Based Menus

Animal agriculture is a leading contributor to many of the world's most pressing environmental concerns. In fact, according to the [United Nations](#), animal agriculture is responsible for 14.5% of human-caused global greenhouse gas emissions each year. Plant-based menu items are eco-friendly options for the growing number of climate-conscious consumers.

Dietary Impacts

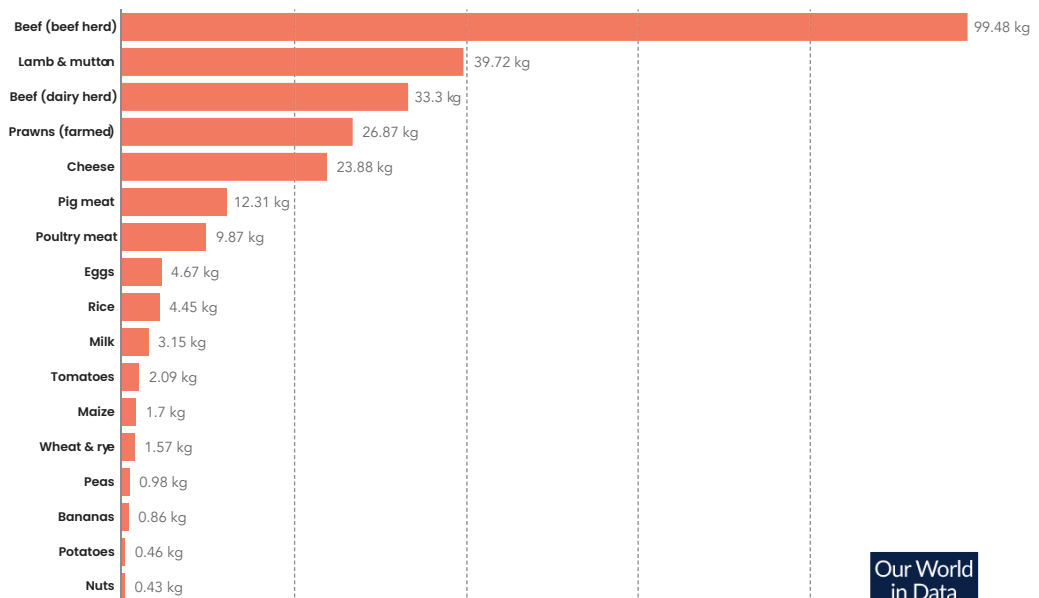


Source: Peter Scarborough et al., "Vegans, Vegetarians, Fish-Eaters and Meat-Eaters in the UK Show Discrepant Environmental Impacts," *Nature Food* 4 (2023): 565–74.



Greenhouse Gas Emissions per Kilogram of Food Product

Emissions are measured in carbon dioxide-equivalent.¹ This means non-CO₂ gases are weighted by the amount of warming they cause over a 100-year timescale.



Source: Joseph Poore and Thomas Nemecek (2018), [OurWorldInData.org/environmental-impacts-of-food](#)



1. Carbon dioxide is the most important greenhouse gas but not the only one. To measure all greenhouse gas emissions, researchers express them in "carbon dioxide equivalent" (CO₂e). This takes all greenhouse gases into account, not just CO₂. To express all greenhouse gases in CO₂e, each one is weighted by its global warming potential (GWP) value. GWP measures the amount of warming a gas creates compared with CO₂. CO₂ is given a GWP value of one. If a gas had a GWP of 10, then one kilogram of that gas would generate 10 times the warming effect as one kilogram of CO₂. CO₂e is calculated for each gas by multiplying the mass of emissions of a specific greenhouse gas by its GWP factor. This warming can be stated over various timescales. To calculate CO₂e over 100 years, we'd multiply each gas by its GWP over a 100-year timescale (GWP100). Total greenhouse gas emissions—measured in CO₂e—are then calculated by summing each gas's CO₂e value.

Spotlight: Dairy's Environmental Impact

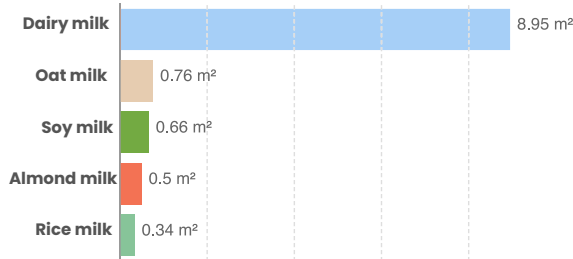
Dairy has a significantly higher environmental impact than plant-based milk alternatives across essentially all sustainability metrics. For example, compared with oat milk, [cow's milk production](#) generates more than three times the greenhouse gas, takes up more than 11 times the land, and uses 13 times the fresh water.

Environmental Footprints of Dairy and Plant-Based Milk

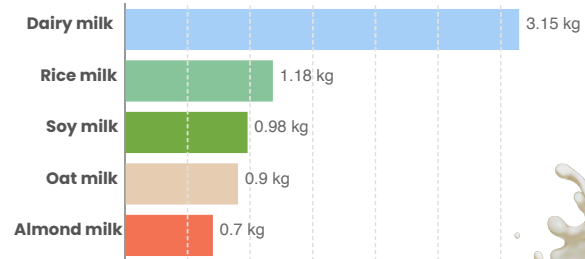
Our World in Data

Impacts are measured per liter of milk. These are based on a meta-analysis of food system impact studies across the supply chain, which includes land-use change, on-farm production, processing, transport, and packaging.

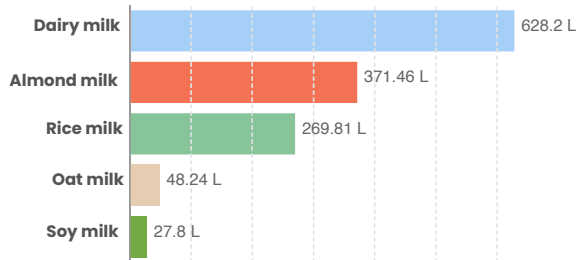
Land use m² per kg



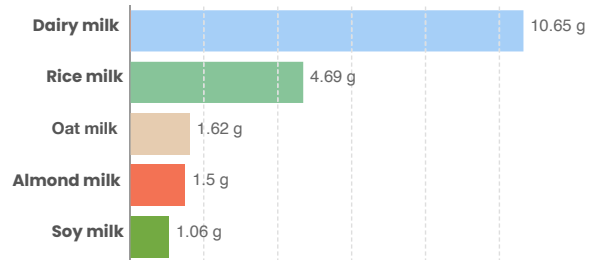
Greenhouse gas emissions kg of CO₂ eq per L



Freshwater use L per Lg



Eutrophication PO₄ = per L



Source: Joseph Poore and Thomas Nemecek (2018).

OurWorldInData.org/environmental-impacts-of-food • CC BY

Did you know?

Dairy farming's GHG emissions are about the same as those of aviation and shipping combined.



GHG emissions from the world's [13 largest dairy companies](#) are the same as those of the entire UK.



Disclaimer: The company assessments included in this report were prepared and composed by ChooseVeg, not the companies themselves.



Baked Goods

Plant-based baked goods have the same appearance, texture, and flavor as traditional recipes, with one major difference: They have a greatly reduced environmental impact due to the absence of animal-based ingredients.

Replacing the animal-derived products in 100 chocolate chip cookies saves...

- 2.6 kg of CO₂e
- 3.2 square meters of land
- 43.9 liters of water



Replacing the animal-derived products in 100 blueberry muffins saves...

- 5.1 kg of CO₂e
- 4.5 square meters of land
- 679.3 liters of water



Replacing the animal-derived products in 100 croissants saves...

- 13 kg of CO₂e
- 14 square meters of land
- 472 liters of water



Emissions prevented

=



50 miles

in a gas-powered car

or



2,500

smartphone charges

+



2 years'

worth of drinking water for the average adult



In Just 300 Baked Goods

The GHG emissions prevented by replacing animal-derived ingredients with plant-based ones in the recipes above are equivalent to those from driving more than 50 miles in a gas-powered car or charging more than 2,500 smartphones. This recipe change would also save as much water as the average adult drinks in two years.





What Is a Plant-Based Milk Default?

When a restaurant makes plant-based milk the default option, all milk-containing beverages are made with a plant-based milk unless a customer specifically requests cows' milk. Of the many types of plant-based milk available, the most used are oat, soy, and almond. Customers can still choose cows' milk for their beverages, but when plant-based milk is the default, most customers will opt for a plant-based beverage.



What Other Companies Are Saying

Blue Bottle Coffee, Stumptown Coffee Roasters, Birch Coffee, Pachamama, Clean, Flash Coffee, and Guilder Cafe are among the many companies using plant-based milks as the default option for their beverages.



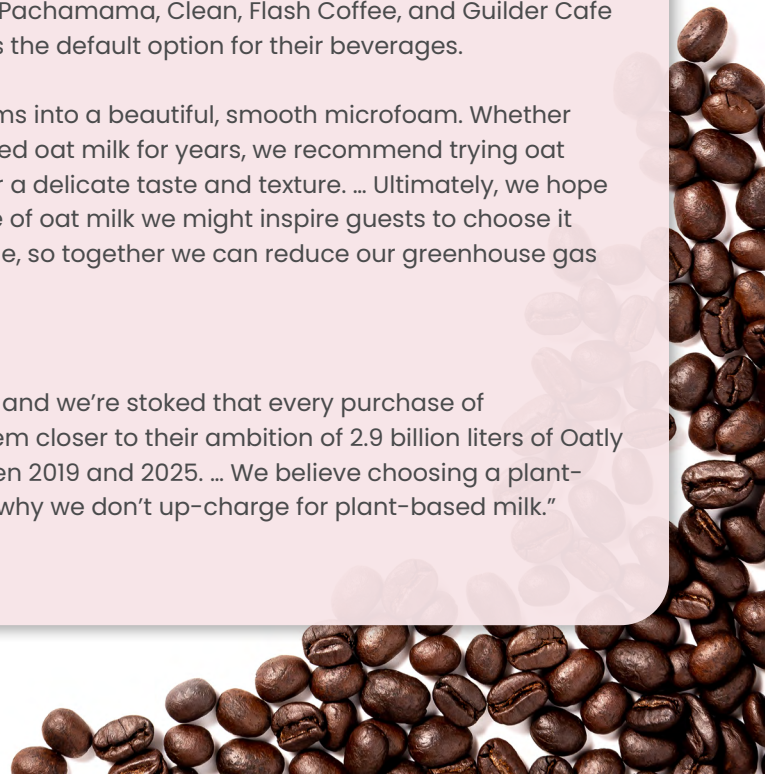
"Many guests prefer oat milk, and it steams into a beautiful, smooth microfoam. Whether this will be a first taste, or you have ordered oat milk for years, we recommend trying oat milk in our espresso beverages to pair for a delicate taste and texture. ... Ultimately, we hope by providing more people the experience of oat milk we might inspire guests to choose it more often both at our cafes and at home, so together we can reduce our greenhouse gas footprint from dairy."

—BLUE BOTTLE COFFEE



"We're super proud to partner with Oatly, and we're stoked that every purchase of Stumptown Cold Brew with Oatly gets them closer to their ambition of 2.9 billion liters of Oatly consumed in place of cow's dairy between 2019 and 2025. ... We believe choosing a plant-based diet shouldn't cost more, which is why we don't up-charge for plant-based milk."

—STUMPTOWN COFFEE ROASTERS





Best for Plant-Based Milk Defaults

Blue Bottle Coffee: Best for Plant-Based Milk Defaults



Photo: Blue Bottle Coffee



Blue Bottle Coffee started using oat milk as the default option for all beverages in locations nationwide in June 2022. The company had already tested oat milk defaults in several regions and saw oat milk beverage orders increase by 21%–40%, depending on the region. Blue Bottle's oat milk default also greatly reduces the company's greenhouse gas emissions related to cow's milk as part of its goal to be carbon neutral by 2024.

Room for improvement: While Blue Bottle Coffee has limited plant-based food options, including a chia seed pudding made with coconut yogurt, the menu would benefit from more substantial plant-based food options, particularly in its pastry selection.

Stumptown Coffee Roasters: Best for Plant-Based Milk Defaults



Photo: Stumptown Coffee Roasters



Stumptown Coffee Roasters began using oat milk as the default for beverages at all of its locations in January 2023. The company had already been offering plant-based milk with no upcharge. Stumptown offers various plant-based food options in its company-owned cafes throughout Portland, New York City, and Los Angeles, including nutrition bars and an array of pastries. Customers can also enjoy a vegan breakfast sandwich at the Portland locations.

Room for improvement: We'd love to see Stumptown do more to highlight the climate-friendliness of its many plant-based menu items. Then climate-conscious customers could easily see which items are kinder to the planet.



Best for Price Parity

Philz Coffee: Best for Price Parity



Philz Coffee offers multiple plant-based milk options, including almond, soy, and oat milk, at no extra charge. The chain's Honey Haze specialty beverage comes with oat milk by default (note that this menu item contains real honey). Additionally, Philz boasts a hearty vegan breakfast option: Philz Plant-Powered Sandwich made with Beyond sausage, JUST Egg, and Daiya cheese.

Room for improvement: It would be great if Philz made plant-based milk the default for all of its beverages. The brand could also benefit from making some of its pastries plant-based.

Caribou Coffee: Best for Price Parity



In 2023, Caribou Coffee dropped the plant-based milk upcharge for Caribou Perks app users. According to the company, as of April 2023, roughly "20 percent of all Caribou guests' beverage orders are customized with oatmilk or almondmilk." Additionally, the chain serves several specialty and seasonal drinks with plant-based milk as the default, including its oat milk espresso shakers, oat milk crafted press with oat milk cold foam, and cold press with oat milk cold foam. The chain also offers a fully plant-based JUST Egg, roasted tomato, and pesto flatbread.

Room for improvement: We encourage Caribou to offer more plant-based baked goods and make plant-based milk the default for all beverages.



Pret A Manger: Best for Price Parity



★ PRET ★

Pret A Manger does not charge a fee for using plant-based milk in beverages. The company's 2021 ESG report states: "Plant-based food is a key way in which we can all reduce our carbon footprint. As we worked on new ways to reach our customers, all our markets and channels were involved in sharing our love of veggie and vegan friendly food." In the United States, the brand offers several plant-based food options, including its Sunshine Bowl and Rainbow Veggie Sandwich, almond butter, a banana and blueberry sandwich, oat milk porridge, a falafel and hummus wrap, and a Mediterranean mezze salad.

Room for improvement: We would like to see Pret make plant-based milk the default for beverages. The chain could also benefit from adding a selection of plant-based pastries.

Panera Bread: Best for Price Parity



Panera
BREAD

Panera Bread offers almond milk for its beverages without an upcharge. Panera has partnered with the World Resources Institute on its [Coolfood](#) initiative to assess the company's menu and label lower-carbon entrees using the program's low-carbon certification badge. Panera aims to be carbon negative by 2050 by removing more carbon than it emits.

Room for improvement: Environmentally conscious customers would greatly benefit from more plant-based food options and plant-based milk as the default for all Panera beverages. The brand's current plant-based food menu is limited to a peach and blueberry smoothie and steel-cut oatmeal with strawberries and pecans. The company's "[Eating Vegan](#)" web page lists other options that can be made vegan by leaving off main ingredients like cheese, yogurt, and chicken. But no plant-based proteins are available to replace them.



Variety Coffee Roasters: Best for Price Parity



Photo: Google Maps



New York-based Variety Coffee does not charge a fee for plant-based milk options. The brand also offers various plant-based baked goods.

Room for improvement: We recommend that moving forward Variety use plant-based milk as the default for all beverages.





Best for Plant-Based Food



Peet's Coffee: Best for Plant-Based Food



Photo: Google Maps



Peet's Coffee has an amazing selection of plant-based food items. In Northern California, the chain offers its Everything Plant-Based Sandwich (made with Beyond breakfast sausage, JUST Egg, and vegan cheddar cheese), a morning glory muffin, and a Guittard chocolate brownie. For a limited time, customers can also enjoy plant-based Mediterranean flatbread made with JUST Egg and Violife vegan cheese. Peet's serves several specialty and seasonal drinks with oat milk by default, such as its brown sugar cold brew oat latte with jelly, horchata cold brew oat latte, and apple-cinnamon oat latte. Peet's sustainable plant-based menu innovations support the company's goal of cutting its absolute scope 1 and 2 GHG emissions by 25% from 2020 to 2030 and reducing its absolute scope 3 GHG emissions by 12.5% during the same period.

Room for improvement: Peet's should remove its upcharge for plant-based milk and make plant-based milk the default for all beverages.

Gregorys Coffee: Best for Plant-Based Food



Gregorys Coffee has a truly impressive range of plant-based food options, including its Vegan BEC (bacon, egg, and cheese), Vegan Deluxe, and vegan breakfast burrito, bar, chia seed croissants, apple-cinnamon muffins, spicy avocado toast, selection of fruit smoothies, and several snack bites. The brand also offers a wide variety of specialty drinks with plant-based milk as the default, including its Fall Oat Boy, iced matcha latte, and iced Excuse You.

Room for improvement: We would like to see Gregorys drop the surcharge for plant-based milk and make plant-based milk the default for all beverages.





Honorable Mention for Plant-Based Food

Barnes & Noble Cafes: Honorable Mention for Plant-Based Food



We're thrilled that Barnes & Noble introduced a fully plant-based breakfast sandwich made with Just Egg and Violife cheese at all locations in 2023. However, this was not a permanent menu item. The company offers other plant-based food options at select locations, including plant-based chicken nuggets.

Room for improvement: We hope to see Barnes & Noble make its plant-based breakfast sandwich a permanent menu addition and consistently offer other substantial plant-based food options at all locations. We also encourage Barnes & Noble to drop the upcharge for plant-based milk and use plant-based milk as the default for some or all of its cafe beverages.





Not Highly Recommended for Plant-Based Customers

A quick note about this category:

Nobody likes to be left out, and while the following companies are not highly recommended for plant-based customers, we want to acknowledge that each of these chains does offer plant-based milk. Furthermore, some of these companies permit customers to add a splash of plant-based milk to their coffee at no extra charge (excluding milk-heavy beverages like lattes). However, the goal of this list is to let plant-based customers know the best possible spots to grab coffee and a bite to eat. Without further ado, here are the companies that didn't make the cut:

Starbucks: Not Highly Recommended for Plant-Based Customers



We love that Starbucks serves a number of specialty and seasonal drinks that are plant-based by default, including its iced apple-crisp oat milk shaken espresso, iced toasted vanilla oat milk shaken espresso, and iced brown sugar oat milk shaken espresso. As of fall 2023, the company offers eight beverages made with plant-based milk as the default in the United States. Starbucks' [website](#) also notes that "in U.S. Starbucks stores, at no additional cost, customers can add up to four ounces of non-dairy milk to Hot or Iced Brewed Coffee or Tea, Cold Brew and Americano beverages." But the chain still charges a fee for using plant-based milk in beverages like lattes, flat whites, and cappuccinos.

Starbucks has set a commendable goal of becoming "resource positive" by 2030 and cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 50% in its direct operations and value and supply chains. One [area of focus](#) in meeting this goal is "expanding plant-based menu options." Despite this, Starbucks' plant-based food options are quite limited, with the company's [website](#) highlighting "hearty oatmeal" and "vegan bagels." The chain's Impossible sausage breakfast sandwich comes with eggs and cheese, which cannot be substituted for plant-based alternatives.

Room for improvement: Starbucks would benefit from adding substantial plant-based food options, like a plant-based breakfast sandwich or pastries. Worth noting is that Starbucks offers substantial plant-based food options in other regions, including its NotChicken Baguette and NotBurger Baguette (both made with NotCo products) in Mexico. The chain could also make plant-based milk the default for all beverages and drop the upcharge.

Dunkin': Not Highly Recommended for Plant-Based Customers



Although Dunkin' does have a few plant-based food options, including avocado toast and hash browns, the brand has yet to release plant-based versions of its signature donuts. Dunkin' also charges a fee for plant-based milk.

Room for improvement: Dunkin' should drop its plant-based milk upcharge, use plant-based milk as the default for all beverages, and add more plant-based food options.

Bluestone Lane: Not Highly Recommended for Plant-Based Customers



It's great that Bluestone Lane serves some beverages that are plant-based by default, including its iced matcha latte and draught flat white with Califia oat milk. However, the chain's plant-based food options are quite limited. Bluestone Lane offers a selection of salads and bowls that can be made vegan by leaving out the cheese and eggs. Bluestone's Impossible Burger can also be made plant-based by holding the cheese. But the company does not offer any plant-based cheese or protein options to replace these toppings. The chain also charges a fee for swapping

cows' milk for plant-based milk in beverages.

Room for improvement: We hope to see Bluestone Lane offer more food options that are plant-based by default, drop the plant-based milk upcharge, and use plant-based milk as the default for all beverages.

La Colombe: Not Highly Recommended for Plant-Based Customers

Photo: © Chon Kit Leong | Dreamstime.com



La Colombe has an oat milk draft latte and oat half tan on tap. The chain also offers a variety of canned oat milk lattes at retail locations. However, this chain still charges a fee for using plant-based milk in beverages, and its plant-based food options are quite limited.

Room for improvement: We encourage La Colombe to drop the plant-based milk upcharge, use plant-based milk as the default for its beverages, and add substantial plant-based food options.

Dutch Bros Coffee: Not Highly Recommended for Plant-Based Customers

Photo: © Alexander Oganezov | Dreamstime.com



Although Dutch Bros Coffee published a [selection of dairy-free beverages](#) on its website in 2023, this chain's menu does not present any beverages that are plant-based by default. Dutch Bros also charges a fee for plant-based milk in beverages and does not offer any substantial plant-based food options.

Room for improvement: Dutch Bros should drop the plant-based milk upcharge, use plant-based milk as the default for its beverages, and add substantial plant-based food options.



The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf: Not Highly Recommended for Plant-Based Customers



Although The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf serves a Beyond Meat breakfast sandwich, this menu item is served with eggs and cheese, and the chain does not offer other substantial plant-based options. The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf also charges a fee for plant-based milk in beverages.

Room for improvement: We urge The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf to drop its plant-based milk upcharge, use plant-based milk as the default for beverages, and add substantial plant-based options to its food menu.



Want to **get involved**
in ChooseVeg's work?

Email us at
info@ChooseVeg.com.



Note: Company information is current as of October 31, 2023.

