

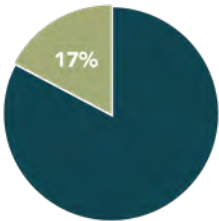


# Plant-Based MREs

## for Active U.S. Military Service Members

### There is Demand for Plant-Based Meals, Ready-to-Eat

When service members are in combat, or other demanding situations where cooking facilities are not possible, the U.S. Military provides individually packaged Meals, Ready-to-Eat (MREs) to support their performance and morale.<sup>1</sup>



**Only 17% of all MREs are vegetarian. There are no plant-based (aka vegan) MREs,<sup>2</sup>** but there are Humanitarian Daily Rations (HDRs), which do not include animal products to accommodate “diverse religious and dietary restrictions from around the world,” indicating MRE vendors can create plant-based meals.<sup>3</sup> The Department of Defense (DoD) procures tens of millions of MREs annually at a cost of hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars.<sup>4</sup>

### Active U.S. Military Service Members Want Plant-Based MREs

A 2022 survey of 226 active service members across all branches of the U.S. Military, conducted by Mercy For Animals,<sup>5</sup> found that:



**81%** believe the Military should provide more plant-based options.



**69%** say there need to be more plant-based MRE options available.



**63%** said they would choose plant-based MREs over animal-based, if given the option.



**24%** are omnivores trying to decrease their consumption of one or more animal-based products.



**11%** do not eat meat at all.



**25%** stated that they believe the current selection of MREs does not have enough variety for people with a wide range of dietary needs and/or preferences.



## Plant-Based MRE Options Would Improve Service Member Health

In situations where service members consume MREs, there are usually no other food options available, so it is important that MREs are nutritious and desirable for service members. Service members indicate this requires more plant-based MREs—the same survey found that:



**52%** believe plant-based foods are healthier than animal-based foods.



**51%** believe eating plant-based foods results in higher energy levels than animal-based foods.

Service member beliefs about the health benefits of plant-based foods are validated by widely-accepted scientific studies. Plant-based diets are proven to reduce the risk of cancer, heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, and inflammation,<sup>6</sup> and lower the risk of diabetes and cholesterol.<sup>7</sup> “Plant based diets are high in fiber, complex carbohydrates, and water content from fruit and vegetables[,]” which is linked to feeling fuller for longer and increased energy use when resting.<sup>8</sup>



## Service Members Care About the Environmental Impacts of Their Food Choices



**63%** believe plant-based foods are more sustainable than animal-based foods.



**81%** want more climate- friendly MRE options.



**70%** reported that they choose climate- friendly food options when available.

Climate-friendly food options are those that help further climate mitigation and adaptation goals by involving fewer greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and being less resource intensive (particularly with regard to land and water usage).<sup>9</sup> Plant-based foods emit fewer GHGs, and require less land, water, and fossil fuels to produce.<sup>10</sup>

## Endnotes

1. G. Sheftick, *More Nutrition to Fuel Soldier Lethality*, Army News Service, (May 29, 2018), <https://www.dla.mil/AboutDLA/News/NewsArticleView/Article/1534667/more-nutrition-to-fuel-soldier-lethality/> (last visited Mar. 2, 2022); P. Krishna, *Unloved by Generations of Soldiers, the MRE Finds a Fan Base*, The New York Times (June 8, 2021), <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/08/dining/mre-meals-ready-to-eat.html> (last visited Mar. 2, 2022) (quoting a recent interview the Combat Feeding Division chief, Stephen Moody, who stated that that “[t]he right nutrition might be able to give us an edge.”).
2. Kosher and Halal MREs can be ordered in cases where those dietary restrictions are applicable.
3. *Humanitarian Daily Ration*, Defense Logistics Agency, <https://www.dla.mil/TroopSupport/Subsistence/Operational-rations/hdr/> (last visited Apr. 7, 2022).
4. M. Platzer, *Buying American: Protecting U.S. Manufacturing Through the Berry and Kissell Amendments*, Congressional Research Service (May 18, 2017), <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/R44850.pdf> (last visited Mar. 2, 2022); A. Brimage-Gray, DLA, *DOD Partnership Provides Operational Meal Options*, Defense Logistics Agency (Mar. 3, 2020), <https://www.dla.mil/AboutDLA/News/NewsArticleView/Article/2100716/dla-dod-partnership-provides-operational-meal-options/> (last visited Mar. 2, 2022).
5. *MRE Personnel Survey Findings Report*, Mercy For Animals (Feb. 3, 2022), available upon request.
6. Heather Alexander, *5 Benefits of a Plant-Based Diet*, MD Anderson Cancer Ctr. (Nov. 2019), <https://www.mdanderson.org/publications/focused-on-health/5-benefits-of-a-plant-based-diet.h20-1592991.html#:~:text=Plants%20are%20high%20in%20fiber.&text=Eating%20a%20plant%2Dbased%20diet,great%20for%20good%20bowel%20management.> (last visited Mar. 2, 2022); *How does Plant-Forward (Plant-Based) Eating Benefit Your Health?*, Heart.org—Heart Disease, <https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-eating/eat-smart/nutrition-basics/how-does-plant-forward-eating-benefit-your-health> (last visited Mar. 2, 2022); Joe Loria, *Eating More Plant-Based Foods Can Improve Your Health & Well-Being*, World Animal Protection (Jan. 13, 2021), <https://www.worldanimalprotection.us/blogs/8-health-benefits-eating-more-plant-based-foods> (last visited Mar. 2, 2022).
7. *Eating More Plant-Based Foods Can Improve Your Health & Well-Being*, *supra* note 6.
8. *Everything You Need to Know About Plant Based Diets*, Medical News Today, [https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/326176#\\_noHeaderPrefixedContent](https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/326176#_noHeaderPrefixedContent) (last visited Mar. 2, 2022).
9. *Climate-Friendly Diets*, World Res. Inst., <https://www.wri.org/food/climate-friendly-diets#:~:text=Shifting%20meat-centric%20diets%20toward,growing%20work%20in%20behavioral%20science> (last visited Mar. 8, 2022).
10. Gidon Eshel et. al., *Land, Irrigation Water, Greenhouse Gas, & Reactive Nitrogen Burdens of Meat, Eggs, & Dairy Production in the U.S.*, Proceedings of the Nat'l Academy of Sci. (Aug. 19, 2014), <https://www.pnas.org/content/111/33/11996> (last visited Dec. 1, 2021); See, e.g., Bozeman, JF, III; Ashton, WS; Theis, TL. (2019). Distinguishing environmental impacts of household food spending patterns among U.S. demographic groups. *Environmental Engineering Science* 36: 763-777. <https://doi.org/10.1089/ees.2018.0433>.