

CHANGE FOOD
CHANGE EVERYTHING

What Is the Significance of Earth Month?



The world is at a **critical moment** in the ongoing climate crisis.

Our planet's increasingly hot and dry conditions are breaking records,¹ starting with a big one: **2024 was officially the warmest year on record.**² It was also the first calendar year that Earth's average surface temperature remained over 1.5°C above the 1850–1900 preindustrial average,³ the crucial threshold established by the Paris Agreement in 2015.

Severe weather and natural disasters continue to impact communities around the globe. The Atlantic hurricane season in 2024 was one of the most destructive in decades, with Hurricane Helene, the deadliest hurricane to strike the continental United States since Katrina in 2005,⁴ causing economic

losses reaching an estimated \$200 billion.⁵ Soon after, on the other side of the country, 2025 began with devastating wildfires in Los Angeles that caused damages and economic losses of over \$250 billion.⁶ The Palisades fire alone scorched more than 20,000 acres.⁷

Wild animals and plants are facing their own challenges in our changing climate. Nearly two dozen animal species were declared extinct in 2023,⁸ and up to one million more plant and animal species are at risk of extinction, many within decades.⁹



Amid the devastation and biodiversity loss impacting the world, many people are unsure about how they can help promote a healthier planet. But there is one major contributor to climate change that we can all directly impact every day through our food choices: industrial animal agriculture.¹⁰



This annual Earth Month report aims to achieve these goals:



1 Bring attention to the **role of our food system**, specifically industrial animal agriculture, in climate change.



2 Highlight companies that are **promoting and enhancing their plant-based food offerings** and identify areas for growth and improvement.

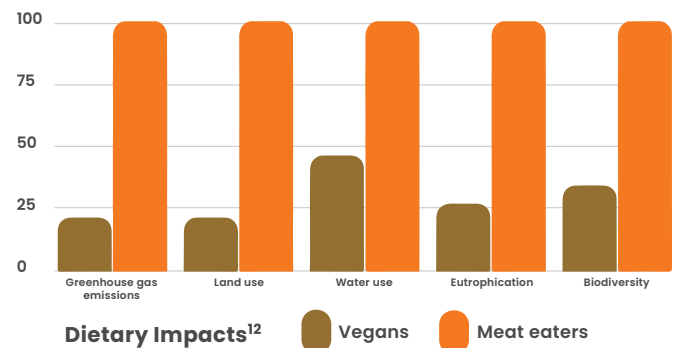


3 Raise awareness about companies that are **failing to make progress** toward their professed climate goals.

The more that individuals know about the planetary impacts of their food choices, the more empowered consumers they will be. Consumer awareness is the first step toward influencing companies to offer plant-forward, climate-friendly food options and holding them accountable for their role in the climate crisis. Food companies, through their purchasing decisions, hold enormous power to create positive change, or do the opposite—create more pollution, carbon and methane, food waste, and climbing temperatures.

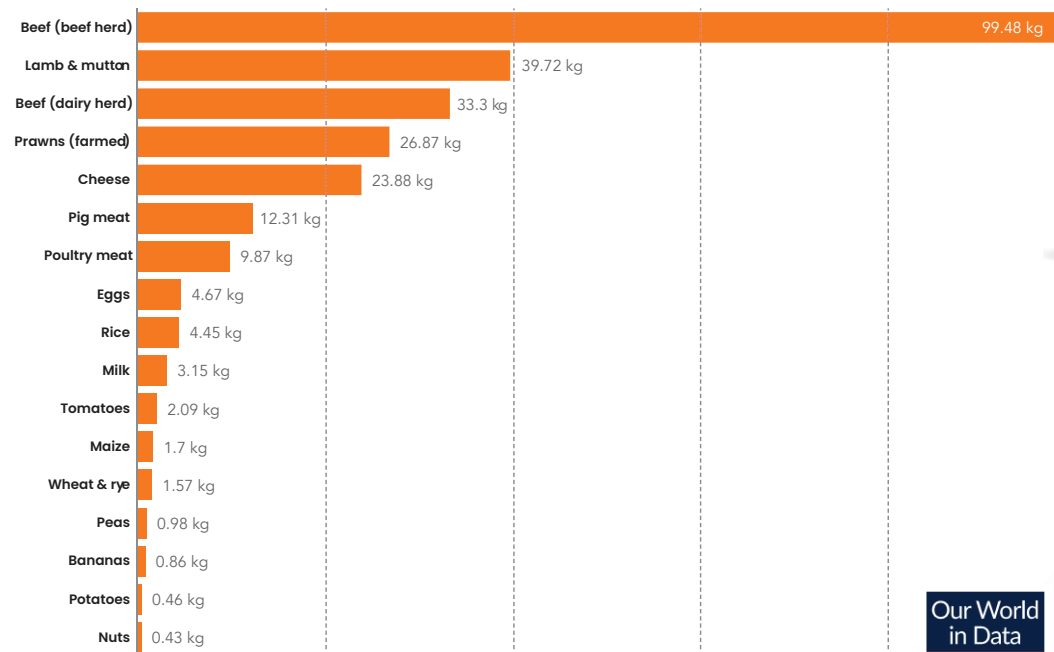
What Is the Link Between Diet and Climate?

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.¹¹ Plant-based menu items are eco-friendly options for the growing number of climate-conscious consumers.



Greenhouse Gas Emissions per Kilogram of Food Product

Emissions are measured in carbon dioxide-equivalent.¹³ This means non-CO₂ gases are weighted by the amount of warming they cause over a 100-year timescale.

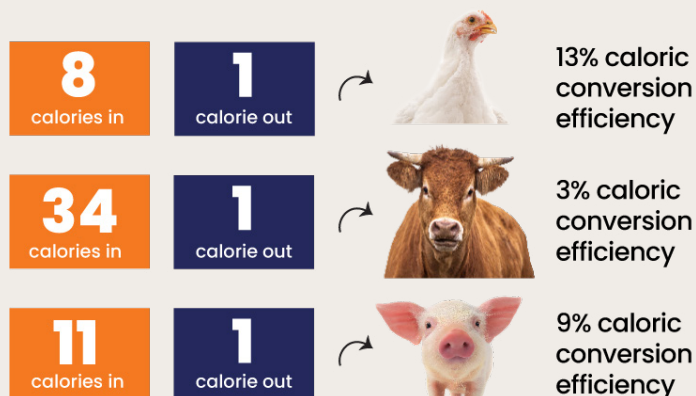


Our World
in Data



Animal Agriculture Is Inefficient and Wasteful

Raising animals for food is an immensely inefficient use of natural resources. Animal agriculture requires land and water to grow crops to feed animals rather than feeding humans directly. For every 100 calories fed to animals in the form of human-edible crops, we get only about 40 calories from milk, 22 from eggs, 12 from chicken, 10 from pork, or three from beef. Every 100 grams of grain protein fed to animals yields roughly 43 grams of protein from milk, 35 from eggs, 40 from chicken, 10 from pork, or five from beef.¹⁴

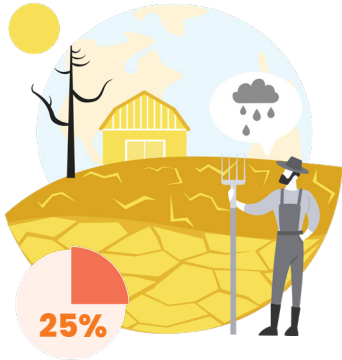


3/4 More than three-quarters of the world's soy is fed to animals for meat and dairy production, while just 7% is used directly for human food products.¹⁵



80% Roughly 80% of agricultural land is used to produce meat, dairy, and eggs, but animal products provide only 37% of the global protein supply and 18% of our calories.¹⁶

Cycling calories through animals in this way is equivalent to 87%–97% food waste in production.



Animal Agriculture **Harms Wildlife Too**

According to climate forecasts, one million plant and animal species could become extinct by 2050,¹⁷ 25% of the earth could face extreme drought or desertification,¹⁸ and nearly six billion people could lack enough drinking water¹⁹—if we don't act now. We can all combat climate change today by choosing plant-based foods.

Research suggests that our consumption of animal products is “likely the leading cause of modern species extinctions, since it is not only the major driver of deforestation but also a principle driver of land degradation, pollution, climate change, overfishing, sedimentation of coastal areas, facilitation of invasions by alien species, and loss of wild carnivores and wild herbivores.”²⁰



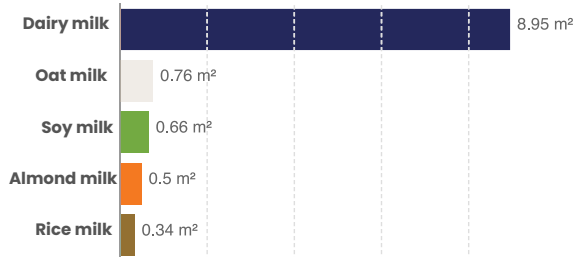
Spotlight: Dairy's Environmental Impact

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

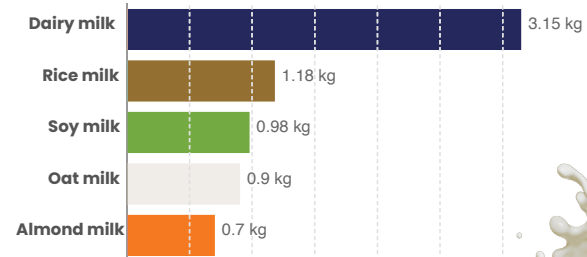
Our World
in Data

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.

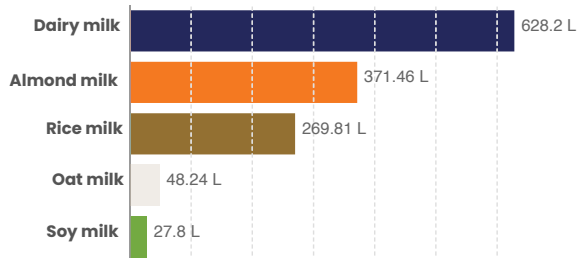
Land use m² per L



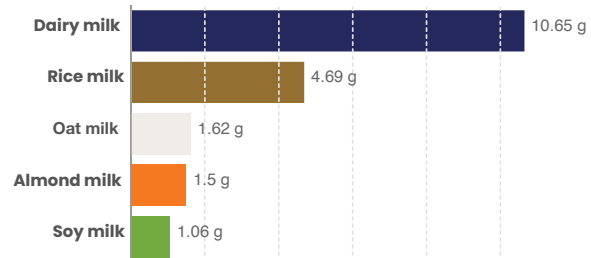
Greenhouse gas emissions kg of CO₂eq per L



Freshwater use L per L



Eutrophication g of PO₄eq 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.²¹



GHG emissions from the world's 13 largest dairy companies are the same as those of the entire UK.²²



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

The Financial Burden of a Changing Climate

Plant-forward menus are not only good for the planet—they are good for business. Climate-induced supply chain disruptions impact production and drive up costs. Given the global nature of many food supply chains, an extreme weather event in one area can have serious economic consequences in another.

From 2000 to 2019, the number of natural disasters (7,348!) increased 74% from the prior two decades.²³ This trend shows no signs of slowing. From January 2020 to August 2023, the global average annual record of wildfires rose by 29%, floods by 23%, and storms by 19%.²⁴



Changes in weather patterns and extreme weather events can **diminish crop yields or destroy crops altogether**:

- A drought in Mexico has contributed to supply chain shortages of peppers for Huy Fong Foods' sriracha sauce.²⁵
- Wet conditions in France have facilitated the spread of a fungus that is endangering grapes used for wine.²⁶
- Storms and disease have caused Florida's orange production to drop 92% in the past 20 years.²⁷
- Droughts in Canada and France in 2021 resulted in a 15%–75% increase in mustard prices the following year.²⁸
- A severe drought in 2021 in Brazil, a major global coffee supplier, drove a spike in coffee prices.²⁹
- Incidents of crop diseases have risen, as warmer temperatures and increased humidity provide favorable conditions for many bacterial and fungal pathogens to thrive.³⁰
- As global temperatures rise, extensive losses are expected in wheat, rice, soybean, and corn production. These crops account for two-thirds of global caloric intake.³¹
- Flooding and "extreme moisture"-related events, which have increased in frequency, reduce crop yields and in turn impact supply chains with fluctuations in pricing and availability.³²

Food companies will face increasing costs of inputs and declining revenues. The James Beard Foundation and Global Food Institute estimate that restaurant-industry revenues will drop roughly 20% from 2025 to 2029 as a result of increasing food costs.³³



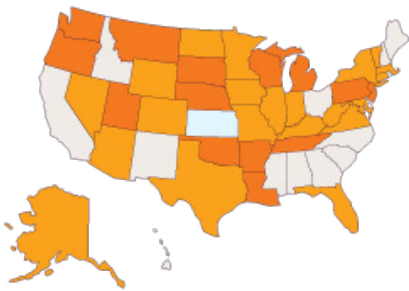
The Spread of Bird Flu



Few topics better illustrate the interconnections of industrial animal agriculture, climate change, and food-system economics than the ongoing spread of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI).

Scientists have found that as climate change and extreme weather events alter wild bird populations and migration patterns, strains of HPAI are better able to adapt and spread.³⁴ When the virus enters a factory poultry farm, the impact can be disastrous, as these **farms keep thousands of birds in crowded conditions that create a breeding ground for disease.** In fact, one scientist warns that factory farms are “the most likely epicenter of the next pandemic.”³⁵

Over 1,500 outbreaks of HPAI have been recorded since January 2022, affecting every U.S. state.³⁶ More than 150 million birds have been killed in attempts to control the disease.³⁷ Troublingly, the virus has jumped from birds to mammals, impacting nearly 1,000 dairy herds across 16 states.³⁸



People are also at risk. The CDC has recorded **70 human cases** of bird flu in the United States since the start of 2024

and one human death.³⁹ While the CDC states that the risk of human-to-human transmission is currently low, experts warn that **prolonged circulation of the virus increases the chance of mutations that could spark a deadly pandemic.**⁴⁰ Since 2003, 954 people have been sickened by H5N1 globally, and about half of them have died.⁴¹

The deaths of millions of farmed birds have caused supply chain disruptions and price instability.

From January 2022 to January 2023, egg prices rose 150%.⁴² **In February 2025, prices of U.S. grade A eggs reached a 45-year high,** owing to supply chain disruptions and scarcity resulting from flock killing related to HPAI.⁴³ **The USDA predicts that egg prices will increase an additional 20% in 2025,** further squeezing revenue for restaurants and other foodservice operators.⁴⁴ In response, some businesses are seeking ways to recoup losses, including passing costs onto customers. Waffle House recently enacted a 50-cent surcharge per egg.⁴⁵

While HPAI has been making headlines due to its role in surging egg prices, the virus also poses an existential threat to biodiversity and ecosystems. **The virus has been found in as many as 500 species.**⁴⁶ One colony of elephant seals in Argentina saw the virus kill an estimated 17,400 pups, more than 95% of the colony's young.⁴⁷



What Is Greenwashing?

Greenwashing is the act of making false or misleading claims about how a product or practice benefits the environment. Companies engaging in greenwashing often use buzzwords, deceptive imagery, or dubious science to make their products seem more appealing to sustainability-minded consumers. The UN states: **“Greenwashing presents a significant obstacle to tackling climate change. By misleading the public to believe that a company or other entity is doing more to protect the environment than it is, greenwashing promotes false solutions to the climate crisis that distract from and delay concrete and credible action.”**⁴⁸



In the foodservice industry, greenwashing can take many forms. In this report, we explore instances in which companies' purported desires to be more sustainable seem at odds with their lack of plant-based menu goals or planet-friendly policies. Companies that claim to offer customers more sustainable options should acknowledge the massive environmental impact of animal products and do more to reduce their consumption of them.



Consumers should be on the lookout for greenwashing claims, particularly with animal meat and dairy. Plant-based options are almost always more environmentally friendly. Any company in the food sector claiming to be sustainability-minded should offer and promote plant-based proteins—and deprioritize animal-based options—as a first step. In 2025, a well-developed climate-action plan from a food company should incorporate plant-based proteins as a key opportunity and strategy for success.

Through this report, we hope to prompt consumers to engage more critically with climate claims and encourage actions that align with companies' goals for a more sustainable future.

The Time for Change Is Now

Earth is clearly in peril—it's time for a societal shift to planet-friendly plant-based initiatives. Plant-based foods are more plentiful than ever, and while a growing number of consumers are incorporating more of them into their diets,⁴⁹ food-serving companies must **take their own responsible actions to combat climate change with more plant-forward menus.**

The following sections will explore all these and more:

- The latest Earth-friendly shift in the coffee industry to drop upcharges for plant-based milk—which companies are leading and which are falling behind
- The foodservice companies that are prioritizing sustainable plant-forward options and those that, despite having clear sustainability goals, are not
- New plant-based launches at restaurants and grocery stores
- Landmark policies around the country making plant-based options the default





Companies of Note: Coffee Corner

Plant-Based Price Parity

Plant-based milk continues to gain popularity and reach across the United States, with the market projected to climb from over \$4 billion in 2024 to more than \$7 billion in 2029.⁵⁰ It makes up the largest share of the U.S. plant-based market, accounting for 36% of plant-based food dollar sales in 2023.⁵¹ And plant-based milk commands a sizeable share of the overall dairy market—nearly 15% in 2023⁵²—and for good reason. Plant milk is more sustainable than animal milk and is the default option for the many people who experience lactose intolerance, particularly communities of color.⁵³ Shifting toward a more inclusive and sustainable future, food companies have begun dropping the once-common upcharge for plant milk. But as with any important industry shift, some companies have unfortunately not received the plant-milk price-parity memo.



Achieving Parity

These coffee companies have taken an important step toward making plant-based milk options more accessible by dropping their plant-milk surcharges!



Starbucks

Starbucks, the world's largest coffee chain, dropped their plant-based milk upcharge in November 2024.

"Core to the Starbucks Experience is the ability to customize your beverage to make it yours. By removing the extra charge for non-dairy milks we're embracing all the ways our customers enjoy their Starbucks."⁵⁴

—Brian Niccol, Chairman and CEO, Starbucks

Starbucks' new spring menu features two seasonal drinks that come with oat milk as the default: the Iced Lavender Cream Oatmilk Matcha and Iced Lavender Latte.



Dunkin'

America runs on Dunkin', and now folks can run on plant-based milk without the upcharge! Dunkin' is one of the latest and largest coffee shops to choose price parity for plant milk.



Peet's Coffee

In March 2025, Peet's Coffee announced they would stop charging extra for plant-based milk as of June 4, 2025. This decision supports the company's three pillars of sustainability, including minimizing their environmental footprint, and is aligned with their goal to "ensure every cup contributes to a better future."⁵⁵



Gregorys Coffee

Gregorys Coffee dropped their plant-based milk upcharge in November 2024. The company writes: "Gregorys Coffee Founder and CEO Gregory Zamfotis, who follows a plant-based lifestyle himself, is proud to make this shift for customers who opt for non-dairy milk, whether due to dietary preferences or taste. Nearly 1 in 3 customers at Gregorys Coffee already opts for a plant-based alternative milk for their beverages."⁵⁶

"At Gregorys Coffee, every menu launch is an opportunity to express our passion for coffee and showcase our creativity and innovative approach. We see coffee differently, that means putting in extra work to ensure every menu we put out is unique and special. This spring, we are all in on flavor, texture and plant-based ingredients. Seasonal favorites like our Cherry Blossom Latte and Flower Power cold brew make their triumphant returns. We are also pleased to introduce three new items this spring: an espresso tonic (shaken, not stirred), a protein forward coffee smoothie that is functional + plant based and our take on the London Fog. We can't wait to have a cup with you all, cheers."⁵⁷

—Gregory Zamfotis, CEO, Gregorys Coffee

Gregorys is also keeping the plant-based party going with the following vegan launches for their spring menu:

Iced Cherry Blossom Latte: Gregorys Night Vision espresso is paired with cherry and rose syrup and your choice of milk, topped with vegan cold foam.

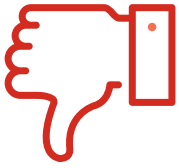
Iced Cherry Blossom Matcha Latte: Gregorys matcha is paired with cherry and rose syrup and your choice of milk, topped with vegan cold foam.

Galaxy Brain Smoothie (northeast stores only): Made with bold coffee, banana, and oat milk, this blend is packed with vanilla plant-based protein powder, almond butter, and nutrient-rich chia and flax seeds for the perfect balance of energy and nutrition. A touch of date syrup adds natural sweetness, while cacao nibs bring a rich, chocolatey crunch.

London Calling: A blend of smooth Earl Grey tea, creamy oat milk, and bergamot syrup makes for a perfectly balanced, subtly sweet sip. The drink is topped with a dreamy lavender-bergamot vegan cold foam and garnished with flower petals.

Vegan Brownie (northeast stores only): Decadent, rich, and completely plant-based, this fudgy, chocolatey delight is topped with crunchy pistachios and delicate rose petals for the perfect balance of indulgence and elegance.





Lacking Parity

Despite the compelling environmental⁵⁸ and equity reasons to ditch dairy-free surcharges, some coffee shops still charge extra for plant-based milk options while preaching sustainability.

Biggby Coffee

Biggby Coffee believes that “when you love the world, the world loves you back.”⁵⁹ **They could show the world more love** by dropping their surcharge on plant-based milk, which is more Earth-friendly than cows’ milk.



Bluestone Lane

Bluestone Lane states: “Sustainability is not just a buzzword—it’s a core value that shapes everything we do. From selecting the right partners to sustainable coffee sourcing and day-to-day operations that align with environmentally responsible practices, we’re committed to doing our part for the planet.”⁶⁰

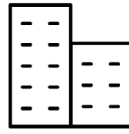
Ditching the surcharge on plant milk to boost accessibility would be a great contribution to their sustainability efforts.



7 Brew Drive-Thru Coffee

This prominent coffee chain proclaims: “7 Brew is so much more than just a coffee stand. It’s the concept of cultivating kindness and joy with every drink.”⁶¹ 7 Brew could cultivate more kindness for the planet and their customers by dropping their upcharge for plant-based milk, as many of their competitors and peers have already done.





Companies of Note: Foodservice Management

Dozens of foodservice-management companies have made the inclusive and climate-friendly decision to establish formal plant-based menu goals. A growing number of brands have taken their commitments one step further and set meat-reduction goals.



CREATIVE DINING SERVICES®



Climate Talk, Not **Enough** Action

Although the foodservice-management brands below have stated that sustainability is important to their businesses, they have not leveraged one of the most influential climate tools at their disposal: **creating a plant-based menu or meat-reduction policy goal.**

Xanterra Travel Collection

Xanterra provides foodservice at many U.S. national parks and claims to be on a mission to “provide legendary hospitality with a **softer footprint.**”⁶² The company says that they take “great pride in aligning with the National Park Service’s mission to provide healthy and **sustainable food** to park visitors” and aim to provide food that “**conserves water**” and “**preserves local ecosystems.**”⁶³ Lastly, the brand has set a goal of offering **70% local and sustainable** cuisine at their land-based restaurants.⁶⁴

Despite these bold claims, Xanterra has yet to publish a plan for increasing the proportion of plant-based offerings across their menus. Prioritizing plant-forward menus would be an immensely effective way for Xanterra to reduce their food-related environmental impact. At a time when climate change threatens the very ecosystems that the National Park Service seeks to protect, Xanterra could better support the needs and goals of their clients by setting a clear plant-based menu goal, as many of their competitors and peers have already done.



SSA Group

SSA Group provides foodservice for dozens of well-known zoos, aquariums, museums, and other cultural attractions across the United States. The company claims to be “a national leader of **sustainability and climate action** ... pushing competitors to do more.”⁶⁵



Despite viewing themselves as a climate leader, SSA Group is falling behind many of their peers and competitors by not establishing a clear plant-based menu goal as part of their larger sustainability plan. Many of SSA's biggest clients are zoos and aquariums that see protecting and advocating for endangered wildlife as central to their missions. As a leading driver of climate change and deforestation, animal agriculture is a major opponent in the battle to preserve wildlife habitats and populations. SSA Group could become the leader they want to be by creating a plan for reducing their reliance on animal meat and dairy in favor of plant-based menu options.

OVG Hospitality

OVG Hospitality provides foodservice for numerous arenas, stadiums, theaters, convention centers, casinos, and other venues. The company asserts: “**Climate change is already impacting communities** where we’re present and our industry more broadly. Thankfully, **we ... are already implementing ... solutions to lead climate action and overcome this emerging crisis.**”⁶⁶ Notably, a division of OVG operates the Climate Pledge Arena in Seattle, Washington, the world's first zero-carbon-certified arena.

While OVG Hospitality recognizes the looming threat of climate change and is invested in sustainable business practices, the company could further maximize their impact by committing to a meaningful plant-based menu policy goal. To overcome the “emerging crisis” of climate change, the industry at large must employ every tool in its arsenal, including leveraging plant-based proteins and reducing reliance on animal meat and dairy. OVG Hospitality has repeatedly scored poorly in Humane World for Animals' *Food Service Industry Protein Sustainability Scorecard*, ranking far below many peers on plant-based menu progress.⁶⁷

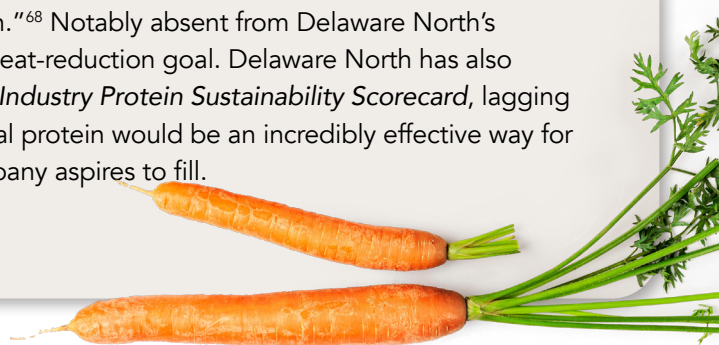


Delaware North

Like the other foodservice brands discussed, Delaware North considers themselves a sustainability leader. The company states: “Our environmental management program—**GreenPath®**—guides us as **environmental stewards** as we contribute to **building a healthy planet for future generations.** To minimize the impact of our operations, we establish goals and implement improvements focused on sourcing responsibly, eliminating waste, conserving water and reducing energy consumption.”⁶⁸ Notably absent from Delaware North's GreenPath program is a firm commitment to a plant-based menu or meat-reduction goal. Delaware North has also repeatedly scored poorly in Humane World for Animals' *Food Service Industry Protein Sustainability Scorecard*, lagging peers on plant-based menu progress. Reducing their reliance on animal protein would be an incredibly effective way for Delaware North to step into the sustainability leadership role the company aspires to fill.



**Delaware
North**SM



New on the Shelves

Organic Valley

This January, the organic co-op known for dairy-based creamers launched their first-ever line of plant-based creamers. The organic oat creamers come in four flavors: cinnamon spice, vanilla, caramel, and oatmeal cookie.⁶⁹

Força Foods

Força Foods has brought a new milk to the market: MILKish, the world's first watermelon seed milk. The brand touts not only the product's antioxidant properties but its sustainability benefits, as it boasts a small water footprint.⁷⁰



There's a new "fun guy" on the plant-based food scene! Meet mycelium (that's a fancy name for a fungal structure).

Meati

Just last year, alt-meat company Meati launched their mycelium-based breakfast sausage patties. According to the company, the product generates 89% less greenhouse gas and requires 73% less water than beef steak.⁷¹ Oat latte, meet plant-based breakfast sausage—talk about an Earth-friendly breakfast power couple!


Beyond

Plant-based meat pioneer Beyond Meat has announced their newest venture: creating whole-muscle mycelium steak!⁷²

Nature's Fynd

Last year marked the launch of the first-ever fungi yogurt made with Fy, a complete vegan protein containing all amino acids, grown sustainably via fermentation.⁷³





New on the Menu

- Starbucks just dropped a new plant-based food item: the Spicy Falafel Pocket!
- Emirates airline recently launched a new vegan menu with over 300 items.⁷⁴
- In an unlikely pairing, in 2024 popular dairy company Carvel partnered with big alt-dairy company Oatly to bring plant-based ice cream, soft serve, frozen dessert cakes, and ice cream sandwiches to select Carvel locations nationwide.⁷⁵
- The first 100% plant-based burger chain in the United States, Next Level Burger, acquired Veggie Grill last year, resulting in the largest plant-based restaurant company in North America.⁷⁶



New Default Veg



- Mercy For Animals worked with Los Angeles County to help pass another game-changing policy! The new policy tasks the county with integrating plant-based default strategies into all new and renewing foodservice contracts. Strategies include a requirement that county foodservice operations serve at least one plant-based entrée every day; a requirement that plant-based alternatives to dairy products be made available; and a recommendation that plant-based entrées, side items, snacks, desserts, and beverages be priced competitively with comparable options. The county currently has about 110 contracts, so the impact will be huge!
- In Austin, Texas, the Office of Sustainability adopted a default veg plan for events and offices as part of broader city-wide initiatives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.⁷⁷
- The city council of Sammamish, Washington, adopted a plant-based default catering policy for all city-sponsored events and meetings!⁷⁸ Mercy For Animals worked closely with city councilmember Sid Gupta for months on this initiative.
- Cornell University removed the upcharge for plant-based milk and the dairy default at all cafes on campus.⁷⁹
- UC Berkeley has committed to having 50% of the entrées on campus menus be plant-based by 2027.⁸⁰
- Nine groups and departments at New York University have made plant foods the default option at their events.⁸¹



Make **Your Food Choices Matter** This Earth Month

Even modest decreases in meat and dairy consumption can greatly reduce an individual's environmental impact. Consider the following easy recipe swaps and their corresponding decreases in CO₂e:

- Black beans' carbon footprint is 96.7% lower than ground beef's. Try beans instead of beef for your next batch of chili.
- Vegan cheese's carbon footprint is 80.4% lower than that of cheese made with cows' milk. Make your next bowl of mac n cheese plant-based!
- Tofu's carbon footprint is 65% lower than chicken's. Experiment with fried tofu instead of fried chicken on your next sandwich.
- Tempeh's carbon footprint is 91.2% lower than bacon's. Consider tempeh bacon for your next BLT!
- Plant-based eggs boast a carbon footprint 98% lower than that of chicken eggs. Try a plant-based omelet at your next brunch!
- Oat milk's carbon footprint is 85% lower than that of cows' milk. Swap cows' milk for plant-based milk in your next smoothie.

Learn more about including plant-based meals in your week with ChooseVeg's [How to Eat Veg](#) guide.



If you are a company that wants to explore creating sustainable plant-based menus, contact us at [ChooseVeg](#).



Endnotes

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