

February 27, 2024

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR LINDSEY P. HORVATH

“Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions through Food Procurement”

While energy and transportation are the largest sources of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the world, the global food system is responsible for more than 30% of human-caused GHG emissions. According to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 7.2 billion tons of GHG emissions came from farming and land use, producing crops and livestock, processing, transportation, and household consumption and waste in 2019. The production of animal products generates 90% more greenhouse gases than plant-based alternatives. Each step of the global food system is contributing to climate change and emissions from food production alone could hinder chances of keeping the average global temperature to rise below 1.5°C or 2°C by the end of the century.

The United Nations identifies plant-based diets as a major opportunity for mitigating and adapting to climate change, and it recommends that governments around the world adopt policies to reduce meat consumption in their countries and regions. Plant-based foods also promote better health outcomes and significantly lowers environmental impacts compared to the average meat-based diet. Animal-based foods, such as red meat and dairy, are typically associated with the highest GHG emissions as meat production requires extensive grasslands, which are created through deforestation. Animals like cows and sheep also emit methane as they digest grass and plants, and chemical fertilizers emit nitrous oxide. Plant-based foods such as fruits, vegetables, beans, and lentils generally use less land, energy and water, and have a lower GHG intensity than animal-based foods.

Some cities and universities have already made changes to the way they serve food in order to reduce GHG emissions. In January 2023, the City of New York, which has the country's largest municipal health system, began offering plant-based dishes as the primary option for

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inpatients at 11 of its public hospitals. At each hospital, Food Service Associates met with patients to consult and educate them about the benefits of plant-based diets as part of their plan of care. After a year of implementing these changes, the hospital system reduced both its costs and food-related carbon emissions by 36 percent and patient satisfaction of the revamped menu increased to more than 90 percent. The University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Health also increased its plant-based food procurement for students and patients. In addition, UCLA Health signed on to the “Cool Food Pledge” which is a commitment to a target of reducing GHG emissions associated with food they serve by 25% by 2030 in alignment with the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement.

Encouraging a shift toward consuming more plant-based foods is not only good for our Earth’s health, but it is a cost-effective intervention to improve health outcomes and help people adopt healthier lifestyles. Scientific research has shown that a regime of whole, plant-based foods is linked to significantly lower risk of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, obesity, and certain cancers. A plant-based diet can also be effective for weight management as well as treatment of hypertension and hyperlipidemia. Furthermore, studies have found patients are able to reduce the number of medications needed to treat chronic diseases and lower ischemic heart disease mortality rates. By expanding access to more plant-based options, while decreasing animal-based products, there is an opportunity to make great strides in addressing health disparities and improving health outcomes.

In order to reduce emissions from our food system, changes must be made from producers to consumers. The County’s food service landscape is expansive. In a 2018 report from the Department of Public Health in response to a motion to implement a Good Food Purchasing Policy, the department found there were 111 food service contracts with 15 departments indicating they offer, sell, or distribute food and beverages. Transforming the county’s food procurement policies presents a unique opportunity to advance health outcomes, address climate change, and meet economic goals. Specifically, Action 134 in the County’s Sustainability Plan calls 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, jails, and other food settings” and should consider implementation at the Hall of Administration.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors

1. Direct the Department of Public Health to review their Nutritional Standards for Prepared Foods, Snacks and Beverages and incorporate up to date evidence-based recommendations on purchasing, selling, and serving of more plant-based and plant-forward foods for integration in County food service requests for proposals and contracts.
2. Instruct the Department of Public Health to report back to the Board in writing in 120 days on the following:
 - a. A summary of updates made to the Nutritional Standards per Directive 1
 - b. In consultation with the Chief Executive Office and County Departments of Internal Services Division, Sherriff's, Probation, Health Services, Parks and Recreation, Public Works, and Aging and Disabilities provide recommendations on how to increase participation and interest, including providing incentives, and call attention to expanding plant-based food options in the County's contract solicitation process and operated food services.
 - c. In collaboration with the Chief Sustainability Office, the Chief Executive Office, and the Internal Services Division, work with County Departments that purchase, distribute, sell, or serve food to better understand the County's food purchasing carbon footprint. Report back to the Board with recommendations on

evidence-based strategies and promising practices that can help track the different types of foods the County is purchasing from vendors, including animal products and plant-based foods (e.g., vegetables, fruits, legumes, nuts and seeds, etc.). Recommendations should consider ways in which the County can reduce the amount of animal products being purchased, increase plant-based food options, reduce food waste consistent goals of SB1383, and align with the Los Angeles County Food Equity Roundtable Action Plan, when feasible. In addition, a plan for promoting awareness about plant-based food procurement among the Departments and potential targets to increase plant-based food purchasing by the County, should be included.

3. Instruct the Department of Health Services (DHS), in consultation with the Department of Public Health, to report back to the Board in writing in 120 days on the following: the total amount of meat, poultry, fish, dairy and egg products and the total amount of plant-based food products (“plant-based food products” shall mean food that contain no animal products or byproducts, including but not limited to meat, poultry, fish, dairy, or eggs”) - measured in volume- that are currently contracted to vendors by DHS in one calendar year.]

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