

## Sustainable Plant-based Catering at Student Union Outlets to Tackle the Climate Crisis

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Decision(s): To approve

### Union Notes

1. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the world has 6 years to reduce its emissions by at least 43% to keep warming at or below 1.5°C.<sup>1</sup>
2. Jim Skea, professor at Imperial College and current Chair of the IPCC, said "It's now or never, if we want to limit warming to 1.5°C, without immediate and deep emissions reductions across all sectors, it will be impossible."<sup>1</sup>
3. Food systems account for 25-30% of global **emissions** - making it the second largest contributor to emissions globally.<sup>2</sup>
  - a. Globally, the largest proportion of emissions from food production comes from animal agriculture (57%). Comparatively, the production of plant-based foods only contributes to 29% of food systems emissions. The most significant emitter under the umbrella of plant-based food contributes just 12% to global emissions, while beef alone contributes 25%.<sup>3</sup>
  - b. The UK could be carbon negative, with no changes to fossil fuel consumption, if we had a plant-based food system and rewilded land, which could also restore our precious wildlife and help to end mass extinction. With a transition to plant-based farming, the UK could free up 51% of its land for rewilding and carbon drawdown.<sup>4</sup>
  - c. The animal farming industry is grossly resource inefficient: it accounts for only 18% of global calories, yet uses 83% of global farmland.<sup>5</sup>
  - d. If we transition to a plant-based food system, we can free up 76% of global farmland, the size of Australia, Europe, United States and China combined.<sup>6</sup>
4. The IPBES (Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services) and IPCC determined that the key solution to the **climate and mass extinction crises** is to restore forests and ocean ecosystems, but the biggest barrier is animal farming

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ipcc.ch/2022/04/04/ipcc-ar6-wgiii-pressrelease/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nationalfoodstrategy.org/the-report/> (pg 73)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nature.com/articles/s43016-021-00358-x>

<sup>4</sup> <https://animal.law.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/Eating-Away-at-Climate-Change-with-Negative-Emissions%E2%80%9393%E2%80%93Harwatt-Hayek.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0qbRS0luKp4JGOAzXXb5P73osdgnYJ3VBJir88YBpMlajmJgOriNVJFMg>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.aag0216>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2018-06-01-new-estimates-environmental-cost-food>

and fishing, which are the leading drivers of habitat and species extinction.<sup>7</sup>

5. Plant-Based Universities is an international grassroots student movement with over 80 active campaigns, achieving landmark wins at 11 universities committing to a 100% plant-based transition, including at the University of Cambridge, University College London and the University of Graz.<sup>8</sup>
6. **The Grantham Institute** publicly endorsed Plant-Based Universities' open letter that was released in September 2023<sup>9</sup>; the open letter called for a transition to plant-based catering within university institutions and was signed by over 800 academics and notable figures at the time of release, including 42 of Imperial's own academics from a range of disciplines.<sup>10</sup>
7. Plant-based food can be more **accessible** to students as it is almost always halal, kosher, lactose free and vegetarian. All students would have an abundance of options when eating on campus.
8. **Cost of living crisis:** students are struggling with rising food prices and food currently sold on campus is expensive. According to a 2021 research study by the Oxford Martin School, in high-income countries, vegan diets were the most affordable and reduced food costs by up to one third.<sup>11</sup>
9. **Student well-being:** a study of over 10,000 16–25 year olds living across 10 countries found that 84% reported being worried about climate change and nearly half said that their feelings (sadness, anxiety, anger, powerlessness, guilt and helplessness) negatively affected their daily life and functioning. More than three-quarters find the future frightening and feel a sense of betrayal by adults in general and governments in particular.<sup>12</sup>
10. Imperial College Union catering outlets are currently outsourced to external providers, including 568 Bar which is operated by Fusion54.

### Union Believes

1. Global food systems emissions need to be reduced urgently, and systemic change can be an effective way to do this.
2. Imperial and the UK must reduce its food systems emissions by moving towards a plant-based diet.
3. Transitioning to plant-based catering would not force individuals to change their diets, but would make catering fairer, cheaper, and encourage sustainable eating.
4. Noting Imperial's privileged position in its reputation and financial position, it is imperative that the College be among the first to reduce its emissions including from food, and to know that there are dramatic consequences for not doing so.
5. Any transition of the Union to plant-based catering must ensure it provides nutritious, affordable and appealing options to its members.
6. By virtue of their standing in society, the Union and the College have an impact beyond student and staff behaviour on campus. A decision by the Union to support the transition to

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<sup>7</sup> [https://files.ipbes.net/ipbes-web-prod-public-files/2021-06/2021\\_IPCC-IPBES\\_scientific\\_outcome\\_20210612.pdf](https://files.ipbes.net/ipbes-web-prod-public-files/2021-06/2021_IPCC-IPBES_scientific_outcome_20210612.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.plantbaseduniversities.org/about>

<sup>9</sup> [https://x.com/Grantham\\_IC/status/1700153314791264344?s=20](https://x.com/Grantham_IC/status/1700153314791264344?s=20)

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.plantbaseduniversities.org/post/plant-based-universities-open-letter>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/news/sustainable-eating-is-cheaper/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34895496/>

100% plant-based catering will send a clear message about the need for transformative change in the way we produce food.

7. SU outlet prices must reflect the reduced cost of producing plant-based food and acknowledging the rise in living costs affecting students.
8. The climate crisis is a source of anxiety and worry for students, so they deserve to know that their institutions are doing their absolute best to mitigate the effects of the climate crisis.

## **Union Resolves**

1. To publicly endorse Plant-Based Universities' call for 100% plant-based catering (e.g. through university newsletters or blog posts, posters around campus).
2. To lobby external providers currently holding ownership of SU outlets (i.e. Fusion54 in 568 bar) to increase their plant-based options and reduce the number of animal-based menu items.
3. To lobby for university-wide 100% plant-based catering, including all university licenced/owned outlets outside the direct control of Imperial SU (i.e. those owned by Taste Imperial).
4. To assist with thorough preparations to ensure the new menus will provide accessible, affordable, nutritious and appealing plant-based food for all for example by:
  - a. Supporting the Environment and Ethics Officer to research and recommend alternatives to the current animal products in the university's food system, potentially asking for the advice and support from Imperial's Vegetarian and Vegan Society.
  - b. Working actively with the Disabilities Officer and Disabilities Network to ensure the plant-based food options are accessible and inclusive to all, ensuring menu items meet the varied needs of neurodivergent and disabled people.
  - c. Ensuring the food is nutritionally adequate by gaining professional support from Plant Based Health Professionals UK.
  - d. Ensuring the new options are appealing for all students by assisting the running of taster sessions with students and staff, and potentially supporting the training of catering teams with organisations such as Made In Hackney.