

The Power of Public Canteens

Political & Educational Paths for Better Public Health and Planetary Health

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Overall Relevance

- **Vegan/vegetarian diets are becoming increasingly popular**, especially among younger generations (1)
- Ethical, ecological and health reasons play a central role in the decision to adopt **more sustainable diets**
- This **aligns with the latest guidelines** of leading nutrition organizations such as the AND (2,3), DGE (4), and ÖGE
- A whole-food plant-dominant diet is the **most effective and cost-efficient measure** for reducing greenhouse-gas (GHG) emissions (5)

Environmental impact of different diets

Food offerings in public institutions don't align with established recommendations

Implement changes through legal frameworks

Problem – Need – Challenge

Eating is a social act that brings people together - at home, and in public institutions such as schools, universities, hospitals, nursing homes/facilities, etc.

The shared dining table plays a **key role in promoting public health and well-being**, as well as ecosystem health

Given the increasing number of vegans and vegetarians, **individual preferences must be reflected in public cafeterias**

Our food system is one of the main emitters of greenhouse gases (5,6,7), but is often overlooked as such

Animal foods alone cause **14.5% of all GHG emissions** (6)

Animal food production uses **83% of all global arable land**, but provides only **18% of all calories** consumed worldwide (7)

Additionally, an unhealthy diet, poor in plant-based foods, is responsible for **more deaths than all other risk factors**, including smoking tobacco (8)

From Science to Practice

Problem Detection

1. Ecological destruction
2. Inefficient food production
3. Increased risk for non-communicable diseases (NCDs)

Solution through HiAP – Health in All Policies (?)



Win-win-situation

Reduction of GHG-emissions and environmental destruction

Improving Planetary and Public Health

Possible Solutions & Key Examples

Universities and other Educational Institutions

- Should teach, at all levels, about health-promoting foods and their connection to climate change
- Ease the access to such foods in their campus dining facilities
- Could, e.g. offer cooking classes or elective courses to further support the transition to sustainable diets

Key example:

The University of Oxford's Environmental Sustainability Strategy, which encourages the provision of ethically sound, animal- and environmental-friendly (i.e. whole food plant-predominant, at best vegan) meals in its dining halls (11)

Public Cafeterias and Canteens

- Canteens, public buffets, vending machines, etc. should offer a wide range of sustainable and healthy options.
- Healthy plant-based options should be strategically presented, i.e. at first sight, highly delicious, and colorful
- Environmental friendly offerings should be labeled as such, e.g. green-food, sustainable choice or eco-friendly meal
- Vegan choices should be the default option

Key examples:

- ❖ In **Portugal**, it is **mandatory for public institutions** (e.g. hospitals, schools, etc.) to offer vegan options since 2017 (12)
- ❖ New York City Public Schools serve **vegetarian Mondays, vegan Fridays, with daily vegan options** available for all (13)
- ❖ **Jails, senior centers, and community events** promote plant-based food throughout **New York City** (13)
- ❖ **Denmark's 2023 action plan** advances plant-based foods in institutions, education, research, and production (14)

Food Offerings in the Health-related Sector

- Hospitals should not offer foods that contribute to illness, but instead provide nourishing, health-promoting options.
- Nursing homes/facilities should add more healthy food choices to their menu

Key examples:

- ❖ The **American Medical Association** recommends plant-predominant meals in **all US-hospitals**, for patients, visitors, and staff (15)
- ❖ Since 2022 **New York City Health and Hospital facilities** have served plant-based meals as the default (13)

Recommendations

Whole-food plant-predominant (at best vegan) diet and food offerings are key to....

Reduce GHG-emissions

Improving Public Health

Increase the Acceptance

HiAP – Health in All Policies must be seen as a framework for climate action and improving Public Health of Nations on a global scale

Public canteens should offer a wide selection of sustainable and healthy food

Portugal, Denmark and New York City demonstrate that the provision of vegan options in public institutions can be implemented through policy and legal frameworks

A Whole-food Plant-predominant – at best Vegan – Diet tackles Climate Change, and improves Individual Health, thus shaping better Public Health of Nations.

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