

Dear Members of the Infrastructure & Environment Committee,

I was so happy when I learned that the City of Toronto had become a Cool Food city, and was excited when I found out that the City was conducting a consumption-based emissions inventory.

I'm writing today to congratulate you and City Council for continuing this important work, and to discuss the path forward for the city's food procurement as a way of reducing emissions.

Although food is a small portion of the City's overall corporate emissions (2%), it is an area where there is huge opportunity to reduce emissions and spending.

Unlike other areas of the City, where emissions are necessary and often unavoidable, foods (*especially proteins*) vary greatly in their environmental impacts and offer an easy place to make emissions reductions.

Just this past year New York City's public hospitals reduced food-related emissions by [36 per cent](#), by making plant-based foods the default for inpatient meals.

I encourage the Committee to continue being ambitious in it's approach to food-related emissions, and to recommend that Council not only aim to meet is Cool Food commitment to reduce food-related emissions by 25 per cent by 2030, but to also take into consideration the 2019 Corporate Consumption-Based Emissions Inventory Report, statement (pg. 26) that City food is "additional 'low-hanging fruit' for emissions reductions" that can be achieved by "moving to plant-based meals."

This past Thursday (September 14th, 2023) Toronto Vegetarian Food Bank co-lead a plant-based culinary training with HSI Canada's [Forward Food](#) team, for fourteen Shelter, Support & Housing Administration chefs, and managers, to help them learn plant-based techniques and recipes, to help City-run shelters move toward serving and procuring more plant-based foods. (See pictures attached)

It was a fun day of learning, team building, and delicious plant-based meals - which were served for lunch and dinner at the shelter.

Veg Food Bank would be happy (and honoured) to continue this type of training for City chefs (at SSHA and in Long-Term Care Homes) free of cost, as our way of contributing to the City's shift toward providing more plant-based meals.

Sincerely,



Matt Noble, Founder / Executive Director
[Toronto Vegetarian Food Bank](#)

p.s.

As a signatory to the [Good Food Cities Accelerator](#), Toronto has committed to aligning our food procurement with the Planetary Health Diet and supporting an increase in healthful plant-based food consumption.

The [C40 Good Food Cities Declaration](#) and the [Cool Food Pledge](#), to which we are signatories, both highlight cutting emissions by reducing the procurement of animal-based proteins.

1. Shifting to plant-based foods is an effective way of mitigating climate breakdown.

The Childcare and Learning Centre, at the University of Guelph, [recently found](#) that "*removing animal-based products from the menu cut the centre's monthly footprint by nearly 65%*," while making their new menus more inclusive *and* more efficient.

Animal-based proteins don't just produce far more GHG emissions per kilogram, they also have an outsized impact on [land and water use](#), and thus biodiversity loss (which dramatically reduces our ability to capture and store carbon in robust and healthy ecosystems).

Often left out of the climate conversation is that animal proteins are also [high emitters of methane](#) (an extremely potent global-warming GHG), so reducing animal-based foods also aligns with Canada's goals as a signatory to the [Global Methane Pledge](#).

And last, but importantly, is that where our food comes from (how far it travels) is responsible for far less of our food-based emissions footprint than [what](#) the food actually is.

2. There is huge potential for cost savings for the City of Toronto.

Vancouver Humane Society has [reported](#) that the City of Vancouver could save \$99,000 per year, by replacing 20% of their animal-based foods with plant-based alternatives.

Toronto has more than four times the population of Vancouver (and serves roughly 7-million meals annually) so, given the same scenario, the savings here could be as much as \$400,000.

[A recent C40 Cities report](#) (on page 40) even suggests an ambitious target of cities eliminating meat and dairy altogether by 2030, stating that "*adopting dietary change is the consumption intervention with the greatest potential for emissions reductions.*"

In this scenario the savings to the City of Toronto could be as much as \$2-million.

3. There is a strong public appetite for more plant-based foods (pun intended).

A recent [Angus Reid poll](#), done by VegTO in 2021, showed that two-thirds of GTA residents want to reduce their consumption of animal-based products, and that [86% are aware](#) of the negative impact

of animal food products on the environment, while ninety per cent of respondents noted availability as a determinant of their food choices.

Canadian cities like [Vancouver](#) and [Montreal](#) have also committed to reducing their procurement of animal-based foods.

Three quarters of the [Canada Food Guide](#) (fruits, vegetables, and whole grains) are foods that everyone should be eating every day. It is only when we look at different sources of protein that we can examine the opportunity cost of the City's food choices and the chance to switch to proteins that produce far less emissions.

Considering all of the above, we urge the Infrastructure & Environment Committee to recommend that City Council work toward increasing the procurement of healthful plant-based proteins, like beans, chickpeas, lentils, nuts, seeds; plant milks, cheeses and butters; tofu, tempeh, as well as plant-based alternatives for burgers, sausages, meatballs, ground round, bacon, etc.

We won't reach net-zero without changing what we eat. And we are running out of time.



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Amy Symington

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