Imperial College Union
Union Council / 04/02/2025
A Gradual Transition to 100% Plant-based Catering

Author: Hollie Meyers, Ethics and Environment Officer

Seconders: Nico Henry, Deputy President (Welfare)
PBU Imperial campaign members:
Oscar Mitcham
Jade Warren
Ashwin Banerjee
Laetitia El Khoury
Benjamin Rubenstein
Sophie Robertson

Decision: To approve

Union Notes

1. For the first time in 2024, the Earth's average temperature exceeded 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels – the target set by the Paris Agreement in 2015.[1]
2. Shifting to a plant-based food system is an effective way to mitigate the worst effects of the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, land scarcity, and water pollution as outlined below.[2]
3. Globally, food systems are the second largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions[3] and animal agriculture emits twice as much as plants.[4]
4. If Imperial cut out meat and dairy, it would reduce its emissions from catering by 40%.[5]
5. 30% of biodiversity loss is linked to livestock production.[6]
6. Almost half of non-ice land is used for agriculture[7] and animal agriculture uses 83% of that, but accounts for only 18% of global calories.[2]
7. The global demand for food is projected to double by 2050.[8]
8. Livestock production is responsible for ~60% of nitrate pollution and ~25% of phosphorus pollution in English waterways[9]. Only 14% of rivers in England have a 'good ecological status' and none have a 'good chemical status'.[10]
9. 80% of a surveyed group of Imperial College students said yes to *"do you think Imperial should offer more plant-based options to mitigate its impact on the environment in alignment with climate research findings?".* [11]
10. Plant-based food also benefits people directly:
    a. The British Dietetics Association confirm that plant-based diets can be healthy for any life stage.[12] Dr Daisy Lund, GP and examiner for final year medical exams, will be present at the meeting to respond to any health-related concerns.
    b. Plant-based food can be more accessible to students as it is almost always halal, kosher, and lactose free.
    c. Food prices are rising. In a recent study, 65% of student respondents reported they had reduced their spending on food due to rising living costs.[13] 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.[14]
    d. A study of over 10,000 16–25-year-olds across 10 countries found that 84% are worried about climate change, with nearly half reporting negative impacts on daily life

from feelings like sadness, anxiety, and helplessness. Over 75% fear the future and feel betrayed by adults and governments.[15]

11. Imperial's Grantham Institute (Centre for Climate Change Research) publicly endorsed Plant-Based Universities' open letter that was released in September 2023.[16] The open letter called for a transition to plant-based catering within universities 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.[17]
12. Plant-Based Universities is an international student movement with over 80 active campaigns, achieving wins at 14 universities committing to a 100% plant-based transition, including at the University of Cambridge, University College London and the University of Graz.[18]
13. The Supplementary material, provided alongside this motion and available online, addresses questions previously raised by Union Council, in detail, in an FAQ format.[19]

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, as a global leader, must take the lead in reducing emissions, including from food. Supporting 100% plant-based catering signals the urgency of sustainable food practices.
3. This shift won't dictate personal diets but will promote fairness, affordability, and sustainability in catering.
4. Any transition of the university towards plant-based catering must ensure it provides nutritious, affordable, accessible, and appealing options to its members.
5. Outlet prices must reflect the reduced cost of producing plant-based food and acknowledge the rise in living costs affecting students.
6. Students, concerned about the climate crisis, deserve assurance that their institution is fully committed to addressing its impacts.

Union Resolves

1. To advocate for a gradual transition to university-wide 100% plant-based catering, including all university- owned and licenced outlets (i.e. those owned by Taste Imperial).
2. To propose the following timeline for a gradual transition:
    a. All university-owned/licensed outlets to serve 50% plant-based options by 2027/28.
    b. Increase plant-based options by an additional 10% annually until all offerings are plant-based, with a yearly review to evaluate revenue losses.
3. For the Union to include a requirement in future contracts with external providers operating SU outlets to increase plant-based options and reduce animal-derived menu items in line with the proposed timeline outlined in Union Resolves 2.
4. To publicly endorse Plant-Based Universities' call for a gradual transition to 100% plant-based catering (e.g. through university newsletters or blog posts, posters around campus).
5. To ensure the new menus will provide accessible, affordable, nutritious and appealing plant-based food for all.

References:

1. Copernicus: 2024 is the first year to exceed 1.5°C above pre-industrial level | Copernicus
2. https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.aaq0216
3. https://www.nationalfoodstrategy.org/the-report/ (pg 73)
4. https://www.nature.com/articles/s43016-021-00358-x
5. Lewis C. *UROP 2021 - Catering Carbon Footprint 2019.* Sustainable Imperial. 2019.
6. Meat Consumption and the threat it brings to Biodiversity | Environmental Challenges 101
7. https://ourworldindata.org/global-land-for-agriculture
8. https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.1185383?url_ver=Z39.88-2003&rfr_id=ori:rid:crossref.org&rfr_dat=cr_pub%20%200pubmed
9. https://www.foodfortheplanet.org.uk/factory-farms/
10. https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/river-pollution-and-the-regulation-of-private-water-companies/#:~:text=Only%2014%25%20of%20rivers%20in,affecting%20water%20bodies%20in%20England.
11. https://imperial.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3Ldkvi8p4U8Bh9c
12. British Dietetic Association confirms vegan diets support healthy living | The Vegan Society
13. https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/educationandchildcare/articles/studentvoicesexperiencesoftherisingcostofliving/2023-09-06
14. https://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/news/sustainable-eating-is-cheaper/
15. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34895496/
16. https://x.com/Grantham_IC/status/1700153314791264344?s=20
17. https://www.plantbaseduniversities.org/post/plant-based-universities-open-letter
18. https://www.plantbaseduniversities.org/about
19. https://pbu-imperial.org/faqs