

P-05-865 Guarantee fully plant-based options on every public sector menu to protect the rights of vegans and for our health, the environment and animals, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 01.06.20

We thank the Minister for Environment, Energy & Rural Affairs for their response to the letter provided by the Committee.

Whilst we welcome the Minister acknowledging the health and wellbeing arguments of plant-based foods, it's concerning to note that the Minister has completely disregarded the environmental arguments we keep presenting regarding this petition.

Environment

Chatham House research states that 'the public want government intervention on climate change issues' and the Committee on Climate Change have explicitly stated that the 'public sector take a strong lead by providing plant-based options in schools and hospitals'.

- Plant-based diets are better for the environment and can reduce an individual's food-related carbon emissions by up to 50%.
- Researchers from Oxford University have concluded that eating a plant-based diet could be the single biggest way to reduce an individual's environmental impact on the planet.

The benefits are clear - mandating a vegan option on all public sector menus would be a simple way of tackling the climate crisis effectively; it would familiarise the public with sustainable and nutritious foods, and would therefore encourage a transition towards better consumption habits in the wider population. Implementing our ask would assert that the Welsh government take the public demand for government intervention seriously.

Demand

The Minister has stated that 'people will make better choices when the choices are easier to make' – the only way to do that however, is to ensure accessibility. Mandating a vegan option available on all menus, every day, expands choice and encourages consumers to opt for food options they may not have otherwise considered.

The Minister also claims that industry has responded to demand by bringing more plant-based products to the market, and yet, the reality contradicts this statement. Response to demand has predominantly been from the private sector, whilst we continue to campaign public sector institutions through this petition, to ensure that a single plant-based option is even available to consumers.

The number of vegans in the UK has quadrupled in the last five years, and continues to rise, as more people become mindful of their consumption. What this means is that a rising number of people find themselves unable to be catered to in many public sector settings.

Inclusivity

We welcome that The Vegan Society are referenced in the care home guidance but we would like to assert that there is nothing within many of these regulatory guidance documents which reinforce the need to have vegan options available in the first place.

What this means is that procurement of foods with animal products generally gets favoured over vegan-friendly options. This therefore leads to a form of indirect discrimination as vegans are often left with very basic options which do not constitute a nutritious meal - such as a single jacket potato

or a piece of fruit - and miss out on key nutrients within their meals. Our petition seeks to counter this by ensuring that at least one vegan option is mandated on all menus, which by default will be suitable for people of all backgrounds and beliefs.

It's evident that our petition isn't for the sole benefit of vegans, but also for the planet. In light of the climate crisis, **it is the responsibility of the government to accelerate a change which encourages the public to adopt more sustainable consumption habits for the benefit of the planet**, and it is imperative for the government to act now.