

Advocacy Toolkit – May 2023

Healthy Future Students and Earth Act of 2023 and USDA School Food Meal Pattern Regulations

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GENERAL INFORMATION

Press release

<https://velazquez.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/velazquez-bowman-introduce-legislation-to-provide-plant-based-entrees>

Bill record

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/3276>

Letter to Sec. Vilsack

<http://foe.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Final-Comment-Letter-to-USDA-on-Child-Nutrition-Programs-Revisions-to-Meal-Patterns-.pdf>

SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT

Tags

Bill sponsors: @NydiaVelazquez and @JamaalBowmanNY
Your own U.S. Representative: [Look them up here](#)

Hashtags (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.)

#HealthyFoodHealthyStudents
#ClimateFriendlyFood

Graphics

[GRAPHICS LINKED HERE](#)

Twitter posts

1. NEW: Representatives @NydiaVelazquez and @JamaalBowmanNY's bill to expand plant-based school meal options will combat the climate crisis, improve student health & advance racial equity!

2. Students are asking for more plant-based options at school — but school districts face barriers in meeting that demand. Rep @NydiaVelazquez & @JamaalBowmanNY's #HealthyFoodHealthyStudents bill would change that.
3. Food & ag account for up to 37 PERCENT of global greenhouse gas emissions. We must provide more #ClimateFriendlyFood to combat the climate crisis — and Rep @NydiaVelazquez & @JamaalBowmanNY's new bill provides a vital opportunity to do so!
4. 30 million kids are served school lunch daily — and Rep @NydiaVelazquez & @JamaalBowmanNY's new bill provides a crucial opportunity to use school lunches as a tool to combat the climate crisis, advance racial equity & improve health!
5. Changing school food is a major climate change solution! If every public school swapped out a beef burger for a plant-based burger just once a month, we would save 1.4 BILLION pounds of carbon dioxide a year! Spread the word: A new #ClimateFriendlyFood bill would help schools reduce GHG emissions while meeting students' needs!
6. Students of Color disproportionately rely on school meals for nutrition. Providing nourishing, plant-based options via Rep @NydiaVelazquez & @JamaalBowmanNY's new bill will help ensure no student goes hungry & mitigate racial health inequities.
7. BREAKING: Representatives @NydiaVelazquez & @JamaalBowmanNY reintroduced a bill to expand plant-based school lunch options, combatting the climate crisis, improving student health & advancing racial equity.
8. @NydiaVelazquez and @JamaalBowmanNY's Healthy Future Students & Earth Act will help schools meet the growing demand for plant-based food. Whether for health, environmental, religious or cultural reasons, students are asking for more plant-based options in their school meals.
9. Having no plant-based options at schools can mean going hungry at schools — especially for students who rely on free school meals. The #HealthyFoodHealthyStudents bill will protect student health & tackle hunger!
10. Thank you to the 23 Members of Congress that delivered a letter to @SecVilsack demanding the new school food meal patterns support plant-based menu items and plant-forward meals. #HealthyFoodHealthyStudents
11. @USDA is about to update the rules for what gets served in school meals, and Members of Congress led by @NydiaVelazquez sent a letter urging nutrition standards that facilitate #plantforward menus.
12. DYK that federal law only requires schools to provide non-dairy milk to students if they get a note from a doctor saying they have a disability? Fortunately, a bill introduced this week by @NydiaVelazquez and @JamaalBowmanNY would change that.

Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn posts

1. 30 million kids are served school lunch daily — and Representative [tag @RepNydiaVelazquez] & [tag @JamaalBowmanNY]'s new Healthy Future Students & Earth Pilot Program Act provides a crucial opportunity to use school lunches as a tool to

combat the climate crisis, tackle hunger, advance racial equity, & improve student health with nourishing, culturally appropriate, climate-friendly food!

2. We are facing a climate catastrophe. We deserve the right to choose meals at school that are good for the planet. Even small changes can make a huge difference. If every public school swapped out a beef burger for a plant-based burger just once a month, we would save 1.4 BILLION pounds of carbon dioxide a year! Representative [tag @RepNydiaVelazquez] & [tag @JamaalBowmanNY]'s new Healthy Future Students & Earth Pilot Program Act shows how we can harness school lunches to tackle the climate crisis, advance racial equity, and improve student health!
3. 30 million children a day rely on school meals, often as the primary source of food and nutrition. They should be able to eat nutritious, culturally appropriate, climate-friendly food. Having no plant-based options can mean going hungry at school, especially for students who rely on free meals. Representative [tag @RepNydiaVelazquez] & [tag @JamaalBowmanNY]'s new Healthy Future Students & Earth Pilot Program Act will tackle this!
4. Studies show increasing consumption of plant-based foods has substantial health benefits, including reducing the risk of diabetes, reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease, maintaining a healthy weight, and protecting against certain forms of cancer and other diseases. Healthy diets can boost academic performance and address educational inequities. Support Representative [tag @RepNydiaVelazquez] & [tag @JamaalBowmanNY]'s new Healthy Future Students & Earth Pilot Program Act!
5. The largest and fastest growing demographic of people following plant-based diets are African Americans, who have been historically oppressed by and excluded from the food system and who are more likely to be eligible for school meals. Many Indigenous peoples have been harmed by our food system too, and historically consumed plant-based diets. Expanding plant-based options – the focus of Representative [tag @RepNydiaVelazquez] & [tag @JamaalBowmanNY]'s new Healthy Future Students & Earth Pilot Program Act – is an important step to advance racial equity in schools and to serve culturally appropriate menus.
6. Black and Indigenous People of Color are harmed first and worst by climate change and our food system. If we fail to slash emissions from meat- and dairy-heavy diets, we will also fail to meet the Paris Agreement target and the world will see catastrophic climate change that exacerbates racial and economic inequalities as witnessed in majority BIPOC neighborhoods. Representative [tag @RepNydiaVelazquez] & [tag @JamaalBowmanNY]'s new Healthy Future Students & Earth Pilot Program Act aims to tackle this.
7. The agriculture sector accounts for up to 37 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions according to the IPCC — and livestock accounts for most of those emissions. Eating more plant-based foods is a major solution to climate change that can be harnessed via school food! Representative [tag @RepNydiaVelazquez] & [tag @JamaalBowmanNY]'s new Healthy Future Students & Earth Pilot Program Act aims to address this.

ACTION ALERT SAMPLE

Dear [Member Name],

Every child has a right to nourishing, culturally appropriate, climate-friendly meals at school. For many students, this means that schools need to provide plant-based menu options and plant-forward meals. But right now, very few plant-based entrees are available in our public schools because of policy barriers that schools face. Kids who prefer or require plant-based options for environmental, religious, philosophical, health, or other reasons are left with no options in their cafeterias. Students of Color disproportionately rely on school meals as a primary source of nutrition, so ensuring plant-based options are available is crucial for equity and justice.

Fortunately, Representatives Velázquez and Bowman just introduced legislation that will help school districts meet the increasing demand for plant-based menu items and plant-forward school meals. The Healthy Future Students and Earth Act of 2023 will provide grants to school districts to help them offer plant-based meal options and ensure students have access to non-dairy milk options.

Tell your U.S. Representative: Expand access to healthy, plant-based options at schools!

Students across the country have been taking their climate activism to the cafeteria. They're asking for plant-based options, which will reduce the carbon footprint of school food. Reams of scientific studies show that industrial animal agriculture plays a major role in driving climate change and plant-rich diets require less land and fewer water resources. But school districts working on a tight budget struggle to provide these options, partly because government subsidies prop up the status quo – industrially produced animal products. A recent study found that only 4% of entrees on California menus are plant-based – and most of those were nut butter and jelly.

This first-of-its-kind legislation will provide much-needed financial support, culinary training, and other assistance to school districts to meet the growing demand for plant-based options.

Tell your Member of Congress: Cosponsor the Healthy Future Students and Earth Act!

Plant-based foods aren't just good for the environment – they're also good for our health. Increasing consumption of plant-based foods can reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes, reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, and protect against certain forms of cancer and other diseases.

Providing nourishing, culturally appropriate meals is also a crucial point of intervention to mitigate racial health disparities and to advance equity and justice. Nourishing, plant-forward diets can also boost academic performance and lessen educational inequities.

Ask your Representative: Stand up for health equity in our school meal programs!

Can I count on you to take 1 minute to email your U.S. Representative urging their support for the Healthy Future Students and Earth Act?

Thank you!

Letter

Dear Representative,

As your constituent, I am writing to ask you to cosponsor the Healthy Future Students and Earth Pilot Program Act (H.R.3276). This legislation will help school districts meet the increasing student demand for plant-based meal options and plant-forward menus. It will also remove barriers for students to access non-dairy milk options.

Whether for health, environmental, philosophical, religious, or other reasons, students and their families are increasingly asking for more plant-based options at school. But cash-strapped school districts face barriers to providing these options. One recent analysis found that only 4% of entrees in California lunches are plant-based, and most of the plant-based options are nut butter and jelly.

This legislation will create a new pilot grant program to support schools in procuring, preparing, and marketing healthy, plant-based options.

The legislation will also remove barriers for students to access non-dairy milk options. According to the National Institutes of Health, most People of Color are unable to digest lactose. Yet, current law only requires schools to provide a non-dairy milk option if the student's parent obtains a note from a doctor stating the student has a disability. All students should have access to nutritionally appropriate beverage options at school.

I urge you to cosponsor this important legislation. Thank you for considering my opinion.

[Member name]

MESSAGING GUIDANCE

1. CHOICE: This bill is about expanding choices to meet the needs of our students.
2. HEALTH: This bill recognizes that school meals can lay the foundation of a lifetime of healthy eating habits, thereby reducing diet-related disease.
3. CLIMATE: To truly safeguard the well-being of students through the school meal programs, we need to do all we can within our power to reverse climate change. That means providing climate-friendly meal options.
4. HUNGER/JUSTICE: To tackle racial inequities, be inclusive of cultural diversity, and advance justice, schools must provide sufficient plant-based options.

AVOID:

- Using the word "vegan"
- Stigmatizing school food as disgusting

- Blaming school districts or school foodservice professionals for a lack of appealing plant-based options
- Bashing meat or dairy; focus on the benefits of plant-based and the ability for students to have choice. After all, this bill does not restrict meat or dairy in school meals.