



## **Briefing for the Welsh elections 2021 on provision of vegan food options**

**Campaign aim:** to make plant-based options mandatory on all public sector menus in Wales

### **Executive summary:**

Plant-based (or vegan) meals are suitable for everyone, including those with ethical or religious reasons for not eating meat or other animal produce. A move towards the consumption of plant-based food combats climate change and is generally better for the environment. It will also improve people's health. For all these reasons, Animal Aid is calling for at least one daily plant-based option to be mandatory on all public sector menus in Wales.

Portugal and California and several Councils in the UK have already made the provision of vegan options compulsory on public sector menus.

### **Provision of vegan food**

*At present, it is not mandatory for public sector menus to offer plant-based meals by default. Plant-based food can be enjoyed by everyone - including vegans, vegetarians, those wishing to reduce their meat intake, and those with religiously mandated diets. Plant-based foods also produce lower carbon emissions and will help the Welsh Assembly Government to meet its carbon reduction target.*

Animal Aid is calling on the next Welsh Assembly government to introduce mandatory daily plant-based options on all public sector menus. This includes, but is not limited to, schools, hospitals, prisons and Government-operated buildings. Currently, those who require such an option usually have to make special requests, and often the food is not adequate.

Plant-based food, also referred to as vegan food, is that which does not include any animal products, including meat, fish, poultry, dairy, eggs and other animal by-products.

There are many reasons why Wales should introduce this policy.

### **Plant-based food is inclusive**

Plant-based food is suitable for everybody. As it contains no animal products, vegan food is suitable for vegetarians and vegans, and it is very easy to make plant-based dishes suitable for people who have dietary requirements because of their religion, including people who follow the Islamic, Jewish, Sikh or Hindu faiths.

Under the Equality Act 2010, veganism is a protected belief <sup>1</sup>. This means that those who are ethical vegans are granted protections under the law. The provision of food is one such protection; this is particularly relevant in schools and hospitals.

This measure will ensure all public sector menus comply with the Equality Act and are inclusive to all.

### **It will help Wales meet its carbon reduction target**

In 2019, Wales set a target of a 95 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 <sup>2</sup>. This ambitious target is certainly achievable, but, as the Committee on Climate Change recommended, it will require a shift away from meat and dairy consumption, and an increase in the consumption of plant-based food <sup>3</sup>.

The production of plant-based foods is far more sustainable and environmentally friendly, when

compared to animal-based foods. A plant-based diet produces fewer greenhouse gas emissions, requires less use of land and water, and reduces eutrophication and soil erosion.

Research from institutions such as the University of Oxford and the United Nations (UN) has shown that a plant-based diet is indeed the most beneficial for our planet. The UN, for example, has urged a global shift away from meat and dairy consumption <sup>4</sup>. Research from the University of Oxford has also shown that the carbon footprint of a vegan diet can be up to 60 per cent smaller than a meat-based one <sup>5</sup>. A 2018 study coming out of the University of Oxford also led to researcher Prof. Joseph Poore stating <sup>6</sup>:

**“A vegan diet is probably the single-biggest way to reduce your impact on planet Earth.”**

The public sector can play a key role in helping Wales meet its carbon reduction target by ensuring that there are mandatory plant-based options on all menus every day. People who use such provisions will be choosing foods that are much better for the environment and will aid Wales in reducing its carbon emissions. There is also great potential for using this to promote Welsh and British produce.

### **Public Health**

It should be noted that a well-planned plant-based diet provides all of the nutrients that your body needs and is recognised by the world's leading health authorities – including the British Dietetics Association <sup>7</sup> – as being suitable for, and supporting healthy living in, people of all ages.

Studies show that a change in diet is essential to support a growing global population. The *EAT-Lancet Commission: Healthy diets from sustainable food systems* report <sup>8</sup> concludes that a diet which is mostly plant-based is the most sustainable environmentally and is also optimal for human health.

**“Global consumption of fruits, vegetables, nuts and legumes will have to double, and consumption of foods such as red meat and sugar will have to be reduced by more than 50%.”**

A plant-based diet, as studies show, is linked to lower blood pressure and cholesterol, in addition to a reduced risk of heart disease, certain types of cancer and type-2 diabetes.<sup>9</sup>

The Welsh public sector can be a trailblazer in this by ensuring that healthy plant-based options are on all menus every day. These foods can be tailored to ensure they enable consumers to meet their daily nutritional needs, including nutrients that experts say the population is lacking.

### **Case studies**

This policy is not anything new; there are examples from all levels of governance throughout the world.

#### **Portugal**

In 2017, Portugal became the first country to pass a law, making plant-based food mandatory on all public sector menus. This means that menus in all schools, hospitals and other government-operated buildings now feature plant-based food options.

This legislative change has ensured that the menus are inclusive for everybody. It also shows respect for the rights of people who choose to eat plant-based food for ethical, health, religious or environmental reasons. <sup>10</sup>

#### **California (USA)**

The state of California introduced a similar measure in 2018. As with the Portuguese law, the California law requires all hospitals, prisons and healthcare centres, and other state institutions, to provide at least one vegan option at every meal.

This Bill was passed with public health and the environment at its forefront. Ultimately, it ensures that everybody has access to foods that meet their ethical or health requirements or beliefs.<sup>11</sup>

### **Local councils**

Local councils in the UK, as well as schools, have embraced this policy and implemented measures to ensure vegan options are mandatory on all menus everyday.<sup>12</sup>

#### References

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- 4 <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/srcc/>
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