

University of Southampton Plant-Based Universities Motion

Proposal Title: 100% plant-based options to tackle the climate crisis: for a just transition.

Who are we?

Plant-Based Universities (PBU) is a student-led campaign calling on universities to transition in a **just and sustainable** way to **100% plant-based catering**. Worldwide, there are over 80 active campaigns. Students at twelve UK universities – including the University of Cambridge and University College London – have already voted for fully plant-based catering in landmark student union votes and referendums, recognising that we cannot reach climate targets without **institutional** shifts like these. This is a campaign that has been endorsed by UoS alumni, Chris Packham, as well as journalist George Monbiot and some 600 other academics in an open letter.

Our Statement

Man-made climate change and climate breakdown are scientific consensus, as is the necessity of immediate action. At PBU, we have chosen to concentrate our efforts on animal agriculture because it is one of the leading contributors to CO2 emissions globally (18% according to IAPWA, 2022), doubling that of the air travel industry at least (5% according to the BBC, 2020). Additionally, it is one of the leading causes of environmental degradation. 85% of UK farmland is used for feeding and rearing livestock, according to the National Food Strategy commissioned by the UK Government. Beef, globally, is the highest ranked contributor to deforestation because of the land required for pasture and for growing crops to supplement their diets¹

Hence, Across the UK and, more and more, across other countries, we are asking our universities to increase the number of plant-based products on their menus to the point where animal products are phased out. We lead this campaign with an emphasis on inclusivity, hence our focus on institutional change rather than individual change.

The baseline is this: every university, now, is producing research that outlines the detrimental impact of animal agriculture and the importance of plant-based food systems. On the surface, this is promising, and it is progress, however what we need now is to take this research to its next natural stage: from theory to practice. Every year, over 2 million students across the UK enrol in their new universities, with the promise that this is an investment in their future. Just as much as these students need their degrees, they need a healthy world to live in, which, as an institution, the university can help guarantee. If we are to allow hope for this generation and generations to come, we must do what universities do best and *invest* in the future, which, by and large, means *divesting* from unsustainable practices.

In the University's most recent Sustainability Strategy (2022), has a section dedicated to our connection with livestock animals, especially pigs. Extending further than the breadth of

¹ *Deforestation displaced: trade in first-risk commodities and the prospects for global forest transition* (Florence Pendrill et al., 2019)

environmental impact, this demonstrates the imperative to restore a relationship with nature; to enrich our understanding and, subsequently, our consideration of wildlife. This puts into question, ultimately, the ethics of livestock farming. The nature of the negative impact that animal agriculture has on the environment is predicated on its inefficient use of land. This presents an ethical ultimatum, as the choice becomes; increase factory farming and allow animals less land, irrespective of the morally reprehensible state of mass-farming, or level more and more land, so they are free to live outside of the corrugated walls of the factory, but decimate the habitats of wild animals in the process. Clearly, there is no ethical answer that exists outside of a plant-based food system.

What would we like the Student Union to do?

Proposal 1

- For the Students' Union to endorse the Plant Based Universities Campaign to support student campaigning, and lobby internally, for university-wide, 100% plant-based, and affordable food at UoS.
- For the Students' Union – with assistance from Plant Based Universities – to explain the reasoning behind this policy change to the student population through an educational campaign (perhaps via an email newsletter), emphasising sustainability and cultural inclusivity.
- Adopt Plant Based Universities as an official campaign on the SUSU website.

Proposal 2

- For the Students' Union to lobby the University of Southampton to go 60% plant-based by the end of the 2024-2025 academic year, with a 10% annual increase conditional on a positive financial and social yearly review.
- Appoint a student representative from the PBU Southampton team to work collaboratively with the Students' Union and University of Southampton.

Proposal 3

- SUSU outlets (The Stags, The Bridge, The Shop, and Below Deck²) commit to the same proposed transition as stated in the second proposal.
- All SUSU events and meetings to be 100% plant-based catering by 2025.
- Commit to a pathway that they, reasonably, will be able to take to achieve this transition.

Our proposals consider:

1. **Allergies and intolerances:** when the transition begins, it is important to maintain focus on offering a wide range of plant-based food sources so as to allow for individuals with allergies and intolerances to access food without risk. Nevertheless, the British and American Dietetic Organisation outlines that a diet free from animal products is, ultimately, safe for all stages of life. A plant-based food system eliminates 4 of the most common food allergens in Europe (milk, eggs, fish, and shellfish)³. A common concern is the presence of FODMAPs in plant-based foods, which negatively impact individuals

² We have not included SUSU Food For All

³ [Prevalence of common food allergies in Europe: a systematic review and meta-analysis \(Nwaru et al., 2014\)](#)

with digestive illnesses like Crohns or IBS. However, there are ways of making plant-based foods safe for these people; a guide to making low FODMAP food here:

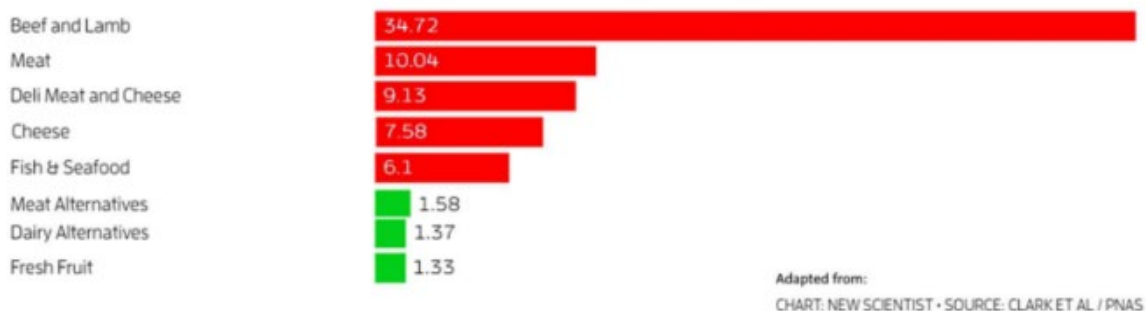
<https://badgut.org/information-centre/health-nutrition/plant-based-low-fodmap-diet/>

2. **Neurodivergence:** it is important to understand that neurodivergent people are not a monolith, and needs and requirements for food will vary drastically between individuals. What this means is that our approach will engage significantly with neurodivergent individuals, and it is imperative that we, Plant-Based Universities, the Students' Union, and the University listen to them articulate their needs, and use that information to inform catering managers about formulating menus and ordering in products. This will mean, should the proposal for transition be accepted, offering a point of communication, through emails to the Students' Union, a letterbox for individual concerns of neurodivergent people, and PBU Southampton representative.
3. **Cost of living and class inequality:** as we have noted, our proposal of transition to Plant-Based Catering does *not* apply to SUSU Food For All, the Union's cost of living scheme that provides free food for any individuals who need it, as we recognise that asking for a transition in donated food could result in less donations. It is also important to note that, according to an Oxford Martin School research study, vegan diets are the most affordable and reduced food costs by up to one third in high-income countries⁴. We believe catering outlets should reflect this.
4. **Financial viability:** we outline emphatically that this will be a *gradual* shift, allowing SUSU and Campus Kitchen to collect market data and ensure the transition is economically viable. We propose a yearly financial review before committing to the next year's 10% increase in plant-based foods. Since August 2022, King's College London has transitioned all cakes and pastries to 100% plant-based and reported no changes to yearly sales figures, but they have reported a 10.7-tonne reduction in CO2 emissions for the year.
5. **Religion:** no widely-practiced religion mandates eating animal products and all plant-based foods are suitable for religious individuals. A fully plant-based menu would improve the provision of Halal and Kosher options, as well as aligning with the principles of *ahimsa* (non-violence) promoted by Dharmic religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, and Sikhism. Additionally, veganism itself is a protected non-religious belief under Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights.
6. **Personal choice:** our campaign espouses *institutional* change, not individual change. Although the transition will have a slight impact over individuals who attend the university or use its catering facilities, the fact is that this is not a ban on animal products on campus, and any student can still eat what they like on and off campus. Additionally, whether a catering facility is plant-based or not, it is going to invariably have a menu that excludes certain individuals and does not cater to each unique preference a student might hold; this is the inherent nature of mass production and mass catering.

⁴ <https://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/news/sustainable-eating-is-cheaper/>

Why *entirely* plant-based?

A fully plant-based system is a proportional response to climate breakdown. We have stressed the carbon emissions associated with animal agriculture and also acknowledge that, without radical system change, our current dietary choices will use the planet's remaining 1.5 degrees celsius carbon budget within 30 years (Oxford, 2020). A fully plant-based food system would reduce greenhouse emissions from agricultural production by 61% (Sun et al, 2022), and would free up 76% of global farmland (Poore and Nemececk, 2018), making it available for rewilding. The graph below shows the environmental impact of UK food products in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, water stress, land use, and eutrophication. The score is calculated per 100g of products.



How will we achieve 100% plant-based catering?

The Plant-Based Universities team will actively help SUSU and UoS to progress with this campaign and implement the changes. On PBU's side, this can mean offering a hand from the Forward Food Program, who are able to coordinate menu consultancy - counting the carbon emissions of our menus - and free training for chefs who are adapting to plant-based cooking. PBU also has affiliations with such vegan organisations as BOSH!, Heura, and "Made in Hackney", who are able to provide cooking workshops for students and staff on campus, and engage the community with easy, affordable, plant-based cuisine. Fortunately, we have the precedent of 12 other UK Universities who have begun this transition and have become familiar with the transitory process.

Summative conclusion:

The information and argument presented establishes a clear conclusion: we must begin the transition to an entirely plant-based catering system. We have existed with the looming catastrophes of climate breakdown for decades now, and it is time that institutional change, influential institutional change, is introduced. The facts demonstrate the clear disadvantages of animal agriculture and the urgency of its needing to be reduced. The change won't be immediate, and, in fact, it *can't* be immediate, but what it *must* be is powerful.