

COP Food Matters

A Call for Climate-Friendly Food at COP26



Building from a number of similar campaigns at COPs,^{1,2,3,4,5} we are creating a global, youth-led movement calling for all the food served within the COP26 official venue to be 100% plant-based. The campaign—housed under YOUNGO’s Agriculture working group—will include a formal request to the UNFCCC Secretariat, the Chilean government, and UK government; targeted social media outreach to key influencers; and a sign-on letter for groups and individuals all over the world to show their support.

During COP25 in Madrid, individuals from YOUNGO, the Food and Climate Alliance, and 50by40 concerned about the climate impact of food served at the conference came together in hopes to align sustainability values with the food served at future events. Our campaign includes organizations, individuals, institutions, and networks that believe the food served at climate conferences should reflect the urgency of the crisis.

The global food system contributes massively to climate change,⁶ and the food on the menu at these events needs to reflect this reality. One aspect of planning COP that hasn’t received enough care and attention is the catering.⁷ Since catering decisions involve a series of choices, why not make the choices that minimize GHGs, preserve natural resources, and optimize our health the easiest options for participants to choose? It’s certainly doable, as there were notable improvements in the offerings in Madrid compared to Katowice. We recognize and value past work to ‘green’ COP food, and aim to build on past successes to ensure future implementation of thoughtful food sourcing.

Plant-based foods are overwhelmingly recognized as those with the lowest impacts.^{8,9,10,11} It’s important that COP ‘walks the talk’ if the UNFCCC, host countries, and attendees are concerned about the future of the planet and weathering the climate crisis. Offering plant-based foods sets a better precedent for individual and group behavior that can have substantial ripple effects.¹² It’s also a symbolic indicator that we’re taking the crisis seriously. Everything from the location of food outlets, to the description of menu items, to pricing needs to be intentional and consistent so that the easiest choices to make are also the most climate-friendly.

We believe it’s vitally important for COP26 to fuel climate action through meals that are less resource-intensive and better for the planet we are fighting for. Shifting to a plant-based event is only logical for one whose purpose is to fight climate change. We stand together in the belief that COP26 should acknowledge the link between food and climate and shift catering towards more climate-friendly foods.

Endnotes

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- 2 "Meat-heavy Menu at UN Climate Conference Could Contribute 4,000 Metric Tons of Greenhouse Gases." *Center for Biological Diversity*, 2 December 2018. Press release. https://www.biologicaldiversity.org/news/press_releases/2018/climate-conference-menu-12-02-2018.php
- 3 "New Report: The Climate Cost of Food at COP24." *Brighter Green*, 2018, <https://brightergreen.org/news/the-climate-cost-of-food-cop24/>
- 4 Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, COP23 Infographic, 2017. https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/cop23-clf-no_bleed.pdf
- 5 Biehl, E. "COP23 Recognizes – Sort of – Livestock's Role in Climate Change." *Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future*, 13 December 2017, <https://clf.jhsph.edu/stories/cop23-recognizes-sort-livestocks-role-climate-change>
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- 8 Kim, B.F., R.E. Santo, A.P. Scatterday, J.P. Fry, C.M. Synk, S.R. Cebren, M.M. Mekonnen, A.Y. Hoekstra, S.D. Pee, M.W. Bloem, R.A. Neff, K.E. Nachman. Country-specific dietary shifts to mitigate climate and water crises, *Global Environmental Change*, 101926, ISSN 0959-3780 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2019.05.010>
- 9 Willett W, Rockström J, Loken B, et al. Food in the Anthropocene: the EAT–Lancet Commission on healthy diets from sustainable food systems. *Lancet* 2019; published online Jan 16. [https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(18\)31788-4](https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(18)31788-4).
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