

# **Wholesome Minnesota**

## **Food Service Advocacy Guide**

Created by **Compassionate Action for Animals** in collaboration with  
**Humane Society of the United States - Minnesota**

## Purpose

Shifting the habits of the institutions we are a part of is one of the most powerful things we can do to create healthier communities, a more sustainable world, and spare millions of animals from suffering. A person eating a vegan diet in effect spares hundreds of animals per year, but one vegan meal at an institution serving thousands could spare that same number of animals in just one day.

Plant-based dining options are popping up all across the country, and advocates are needed to take the lead to introduce this impactful change at community institutions here in Minnesota. You're invited to join this effort using the following step-by-step guide and with the support of the project coordinator, online community, and in-person training sessions.

## Training

1. *Attend a quarterly Food Service Advocacy meeting with Compassionate Action for Animals and The Humane Society of the United States - Minnesota.*
  - The next training session will be posted at [exploreveg.org](http://exploreveg.org). Contact [wholesome.minnesota@exploreveg.org](mailto:wholesome.minnesota@exploreveg.org) to register.
  - Grab some gear! CAA will provide you with materials and swag to help you pitch plant-based meal options to your institution with confidence and flair.
2. *Learn more about the benefits of a plant-based meal program.*
  - Supplement your learning with personal research. Explore these resources:
    - HSUS's Meatless Monday online toolkit at [bit.ly/mmtreekit](http://bit.ly/mmtreekit)
    - Forward Food at [forwardfood.org](http://forwardfood.org)

## Taking Action

3. *Identify the institution you'll approach.*
  - Make a list of institutions you're connected to and select the one you think would be the best fit. Here are some ideas to get you started:
    - Your workplace or a partner corporation
    - Your elementary school, high school, or college (current or past)
    - Your child's elementary school, high school, or college
    - Your relative's retirement home

- Your favorite restaurant
  - Your faith community
  - A government facility, military base, or prison
4. *Consider shared goals and values between a plant-based meal program and the institution you're approaching.*
- Carefully research the mission and values of the institution you are approaching. Consider your shared priorities. In what ways would a plant-based meal program help them better meet their goals or serve their community?
  - Find what food service provider your institution uses (examples are Aramark, Sodexo, Centerplate, Compass). Aramark has developed plant-based menu options that can make the process easy.
  - *Remember:* Plant-based meal programs increase options and create a more inclusive community where everyone can find healthy foods that meet their nutritional needs and accommodate their dietary restrictions, whether religious, health-related, or ethical. Plant-based meal options can encompass a broad range of nutritious and delicious offerings.
5. *Find other enthusiasts of plant-based meal programs in your institution's community.*
- Tell your colleagues or friends in your institutional community about plant-based meal options. You could share your enthusiasm with them in person, share Julie's Story ([bit.ly/juliestory](http://bit.ly/juliestory)), or send one of the electronic resources from step two.
  - Identify at least one other enthusiast who would be willing to champion the program alongside you.
6. *Determine who to contact about implementing a plant-based meal program and what you're going to ask for.*
- The role or position of the best contact person may differ from institution to institution. Some of the most common job titles for this role include:
    - Food Services Director
    - Executive Chef
    - Registered Dietician
    - Menu Planner
    - Sustainability Manager

- To clarify, consider asking them who creates the menus to make sure you've got the name of the best person to talk to. In most cases, the person who makes the menus will be the person to make a decision on a plant-based meal program.
- Decide what you will ask for. That might mean a Meatless Monday, a plant-based food station, a Lean and Green day, offering plant milks as an option, etc.

#### 7. Schedule a meeting.

- Set up a meeting to talk with the person you've identified. Here's what volunteer Julie Knopp emailed to the Food Services Manager in charge of all school menus for Richfield Public Schools:
  - *Hi Pam, My name is Julie, and I am a kindergarten teacher here at Richfield Public Schools. I'm also very passionate about food and healthy eating! I love the work you're doing to offer more fruits and vegetables to our kids. I had an idea for menu planning that I'd love to share with you. Our fantastic food service manager Wendy told me that you are in charge of menus. Is there a time you'd be available to meet over the next week or two? I'm available from 6:00 to 7:20 each morning or anytime at or after 1:00 on most weekdays. Thanks!*
- Follow up with a phone call if appropriate or a second email if you have not heard back in one week. Your email might read:
  - *Hi Pam, Just following up on the email below. I'd love to meet with you and talk about healthy options at our school. Looking forward to hearing from you!*

#### 8. Prepare for and attend the meeting. Rehearse before with your fellow advocate.

- You might follow this formula:
  - Build rapport. Come prepared to talk about something, such as a mutual work friend, a recent meal you loved, a work event, weather or a recent holiday, etc.
  - Lead with the positives. Tell them what you appreciate about their work and the food services at your institution. What do you have in common with them?
  - Tell them you recently learned about a popular program popping up in schools across the state. This program, sometimes called Meatless Monday or Lean & Green, offers plant-based options one day per week to fight obesity, increase sustainability, and improve animal welfare. Name several other institutions that are doing the program and hand them a printout of testimonials from stakeholders in those communities.

- Explain why you think plant-based meal options might be a good fit for the institution and how they exemplify institutional values. Here are some statistics you can share support your claim:
  - Consumer Demand
    - Gen Z consumers (born between the mid-90s and mid 2000s) report craving “plant-based menus” and consume 57% more tofu and 550% more nondairy milk than millennials, according to *Business Insider*.
    - The demand for meat-free meals is growing among people of many ages. Allied Market Research reports that the substitute meat market is expected to grow 8.4% annually over the next three years, reaching \$5.2 billion globally by 2020.
    - If they’d like to see the stats themselves, refer them to [bit.ly/stats4food](http://bit.ly/stats4food).
  - Health
    - Diets rich in vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, and nuts are consistently linked to lower obesity rates, blood cholesterol levels and blood pressure.
    - In a recent Harvard study, researchers found that those who replaced meat with plant-based proteins decreased their chance of mortality up to 11%.
  - Sustainability
    - According to the Environmental Defense Fund, “If every American skipped one meal of chicken per week and substituted vegetables and grains...the carbon dioxide savings would be the same as taking more than half a million cars off of U.S. roads.”
    - The United Nations lists animal agriculture as one of the top contributors to global environmental problems, due to its vast use of water, land, and fossil fuels, and high carbon dioxide and methane emissions.

#### 9. Determine next steps.

- What if they say yes?
  - Ask if you can provide other resources to support them. You could hand them the HSUS guide for food service professionals, connect them with Leolin Bowen ([lbowen@humanesociety.org](mailto:lbowen@humanesociety.org)) for free continuing education or support with menu planning

and offer to volunteer by creating or posting promotional materials to help with implementation.

- Ask them what next steps might be. Say that you'll follow up with them in a week to see how things are going. Let them know you are excited about the change and its impact on the community.
- Follow up one week later. Ask how their progress is going and offer to connect them with resources if desired.
- What if they say no?
  - Respect their choice. Avoid expressing frustration or belligerence. Ask why they don't think it's a good idea at this time. Listen to their feedback. Write it down so that we can better understand the decision making process at institutions we approach. Tell them that you understand and you appreciate their time.
  - Ask if they might consider another option, such as one meatless day per month or more meatless entree options. You also might suggest checking back in with them in six months or a year.
  - By now, you've gained a lot of experience at pitching to food service programs. Consider trying again with another institution from the list you drafted earlier. The preparation process will be quicker and easier the second time around.
- What if they say they'll think about it?
  - Give them time and show respect for their decision-making process. Avoid expressing impatience.
  - Ask them what next steps might be. Find out what they need to consider or who they need to check with. Suggest a date when you will follow up to see how things are going or if there's any other information that might be helpful in making their decision. Let them know you are excited about the possibility of this change and its impact on the community.
  - Follow up when you said you would. Ask how their decision-making process is going and offer to connect them with resources if desired.

## Reflection & Sharing

### 10. Document

- a. Go to [bit.ly/foodadvocacyreporting](https://bit.ly/foodadvocacyreporting) and record who you met with and what happened. Document the institution's response (whether yes, no, or maybe) in the "comments" field.
- b. Your documentation helps Wholesome Minnesota to become a more effective program and will inspire others working across the state.
- c. Provide updates on your progress to program administrators at [wholesome.minnesota@exploreveg.org](mailto:wholesome.minnesota@exploreveg.org), or they will follow up with you directly. Please be sure to fill in your contact information carefully on the form.

### 11. Celebrate!

- Whatever the outcome, you have raised awareness about plant-based meal options in our community. On behalf of the animals, the planet, and the humans who will benefit, thank you for investing your time and energy in changing the way public institutions offer dining options.
- If the institution did make a change, encourage your friends and family to provide them with positive feedback. You also might want to consider writing a letter to the editor of your local paper celebrating the change.
- Attend the next quarterly Food Service Advocacy meeting with CAA. Visit [exploreveg.org/events](https://exploreveg.org/events) for the date. We invite those who have participated in this program to come to the meetings and share their experiences and insights. It'll also be an opportunity to celebrate our strides as a community of animal advocates.

**NOTES**

