



**DefaultVeg**  
A Better Food Foundation Initiative

# Flip Your School's Food with Plant-Based Defaults



## Why Plant-Based Defaults?

We've all had the experience of sitting down to eat at a cafeteria or restaurant and discovering that meat, dairy, poultry, fish, and eggs dominate the menu, while one or two plant-based options are relegated to a small section at the very bottom.

Not only is this alienating for the millions who choose to forgo animal products for their health, the environment, animals, or religious and cultural reasons, but it also sets a harmful standard: a “normal” meal must have animal ingredients at its center. **Flip it!**

Imagine a different world, or at least a different campus experience—one where it's easy for everyone to make the sustainable choice because it's become normal. A plant-forward menu does just that: it features plant-based meals as the default option, while giving diners the choice to add or opt in to meat, dairy, poultry, fish, or egg options upon request.

By simply presenting a new default through this behavioral ‘Nudge’, people are much more likely to choose a plant-based meal, even when animal ingredient options are available.

**Plant-Based Food by Default** does not take away choice—it simply flips which choices are offered as the default. We've found that students and faculty have a much easier time asking for this change and getting others to say, “Yes, enthusiastically!”

## Who is this toolkit for?

If you're a college or university student, faculty, or staff member and want to champion sustainability, health, or saving animals, then this is for you—no experience needed!

This toolkit makes it easy to kickstart changes for cafeterias, events, clubs, catering, or even your campus coffee shops. 👍

# Here are five simple ways to flip your campus's food and drink!

1

## Student Groups & Clubs

Start with groups where you already have connections on campus—**environmental clubs, social groups, or volunteer organizations**. A suggestion from a familiar face to offer **plant-based options first** at events (with animal products available by request) is often well-received and creates an easy win. This simple approach is an effective way to create meaningful change through your existing relationships.

2

## Offices & Departments

**College offices and academic departments, such as those focused on sustainability**, are great places to start gathering support for this approach from school administrators. And don't forget faculty members you already have a good relationship with, who can help you get commitments for plant-based catering by default for their department.

3

## Conferences & Events

If your school hosts a **conference, summit, ceremony**, or other significant event, please reach out to the event organizers and inform them about serving Plant-Based Default menus. If participants register in advance, the conference can easily mention in the registration or invite, "This event is serving a plant-based menu. If you have dietary needs, please include your choices below."

4

## Dining Halls & Cafeterias

Ask decision-makers in your campus dining halls or cafeterias to adopt Plant-Based Defaults in their menu offerings. Educate decision-makers on other easy nudges, their benefits and costs, environmental impacts, health implications, and customer satisfaction. Once dining leaders at your school are interested, connect them to Better Food Foundation staff to support them in implementing easy and affordable changes to their menus.

5

## Cafes & Coffee Shops

**Cafes and coffee shops** are great places for Defaults. Coffee shops can offer oat milk by default (or any plant-based milk) and eliminate the upcharge for plant-based milk options - an unfair charge for lactose-intolerant customers. (Starbucks, Peet's Coffee, Cornell University, University of San Diego, and many others have dropped the upcharge). Print out our **Oat Milk By Default Guide** to share with your school's coffee shop manager or staff.

# Plant-Based Default Solutions

## Plant-Based Defaults help schools address multiple challenges:

- **Sustainability:** A recent study at three university campuses found that when the cafeteria consistently served plant-based defaults, the uptake of plant-based foods increased dramatically, without any other change. Institutions can reduce food-related carbon emissions by up to 40% and water savings by up to 24%. Plus, preserve the biodiversity of our planet!
- **Allergies & Religious Dietary Needs:** Flipping the default makes menus more inclusive so everyone can eat, including those with allergies (especially 65% of the world population that experience a reduced ability to digest lactose) or religious dietary restrictions. Also, increasing the availability of healthy plant-based meals is key for low-income students who may not have access to nutritious meals at home.
- **Cost Savings:** NYC hospitals save \$0.59 per meal by serving plant-based food by default!

Your school can join the trailblazing colleges and universities building a plant-based food norm on campuses around the globe!



Berkeley  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA



Northwestern  
University



HARVARD  
Office for Sustainability



University  
of Victoria

Ucla



## Join Us!

Do you want to flip food at your school but need a little more guidance or support?

Apply to the [DefaultVeg Internship Program](#) and connect to students around the world who are flipping the norm on their campuses.

Join a [Nudge Training Session](#), free monthly workshops to learn about the top 5 behavioral nudges and how to advocate for food systems change in your community.

## Share your successes!

Do you have a success story?

Tell us so we can track how far this change is spreading. Share your story to inspire a plant-based food norm across campuses.

[betterfoodfoundation.org](http://betterfoodfoundation.org)  
[@betterfoodfoundation](https://twitter.com/betterfoodfoundation)  
[@defaultveg](https://twitter.com/defaultveg)  
[info@betterfoodfoundation.org](mailto:info@betterfoodfoundation.org)

