

Motion Name: Transition to Sustainable and Affordable Catering as a Students' Union by Expanding Plant-Based Options

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Background

1. Plant-based food refers to food free of animal products, often for its health and environmental benefits, or to reduced animal suffering. It aligns with the diets consumed by vegans, though does not extend to other ethical components of veganism[1].
2. Bristol University has always led on Climate Action. We were the first university to declare a climate emergency in 2019 [2], and in 2020, our university became one of the first in England to cut all ties with fossil fuel companies [3]. Yet research has shown transitioning to renewable energy will not be enough to keep us below 1.5°C degrees of warming. And without reducing meat and animal product consumption, our planet is at serious risk of crossing the vital 2°C threshold [4]. That means more deaths from extreme weather, famines, and wars caused by climate change.
3. A recent study by People and Planet ranked Bristol 33rd among UK universities for the sustainability of its food [5], highlighting significant opportunities to reduce meat consumption and its environmental impact further.
4. Recent research by the Bryant Institute showed that a large university like Bristol could reduce its Carbon emissions from food by 80% by adopting Plant-Based Catering [6]. Additionally, we could feed the same number of students with 15 million fewer square metres of land - an area nine times the size of the Downs. Reforesting an area this size would result in drastic Carbon Dioxide removal from our atmosphere, effectively making our university carbon-negative.
5. A plant-based diet is suitable for children, adolescents, and adults, including during pregnancy and breastfeeding [7]. With sufficient attention to protein sources, it can be significantly healthier than an omnivorous diet, reducing cholesterol levels [8] and obesity [9], alongside the risk of heart disease [10], stroke [11], diabetes [12], and several cancers [13]. Young adults who adopt a plant-based diet could add 10 years to their life expectancy [14].
6. Plant-based options are accessible to a wider student body. Providing it is alcohol-free, all plant-based food is Halal, Kosher and suitable for Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Vegetarians and Vegans [15, 16]. Plant-based food also aligns strongly with the Jainist concept of Ahimsa, to not cause harm to any sentient creature[17]. It is also naturally free from milk, egg, crustaceans, molluscs and fish, five of the major 14 allergens [18]. Many cuisines, such as those from the Middle East, India, East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa already have many plant-based dishes [19].

7. Recent evidence suggests that plant-based meals are more cost-effective to prepare than meat-based options [6], helping keep food prices affordable during financially challenging times.
8. Universities across Europe are listening to the climate science. To date, 13 universities have committed to a transition to fully plant-based catering [20], with countless other figures supporting the change, including Bristol Central MP, Carla Denyer [21]. Tonight is an opportunity to take an action for us all to be proud of - to be an example for others to follow. Voting to endorse Bristol becoming a Plant-Based University today has the power to take thousands of tonnes of Carbon Dioxide out of the atmosphere[22], saving lives from climate catastrophe.

Purpose

1. Our motion aims to show that our Students' Union is unambiguously committed to reducing our climate impact and to ensure that it prioritises plant-based food options when organising future sponsorships and negotiating contracts.
2. Our motion will not force anyone to become Vegetarian or Vegan, nor does it call for the full removal of animal products from catering or events. Student choice, variety and nutrition will remain priorities for catering.
3. This motion focuses on expanding the variety and affordability of pre-packaged plant-based food, where we believe there is considerable potential for improvement.
4. We propose this motion because the science is clear: plant-based nutrition is more sustainable, more affordable and healthier. Therefore we can clearly reason that plant-based food is more ethical.
5. We recognise that universities have long been at the forefront of environmental and social justice movements, and we believe that passing this motion will send a powerful message to students, the city of Bristol, and our government that our food system must evolve.

Actions

1. For the SU to Support the Actions of Plant Based Universities Bristol in their campaign to improve plant-based pre-packaged food in Source Cafeterias by emailing and lobbying Source, allowing the group to use their support as evidence in meetings, and writing a statement to show support.
2. For SU Officers to lobby the university and Source Catering for affordable plant-based food at all future meetings across the university. The Students' Union should press Source Catering to expand the proportion of its pre-packaged food that is plant-based each year for 2025-26, 2026-27 and 2027-28.

3. The Students' Union should also press Source Catering to reduce price bands for pre-packaged plant-based food. This should help ensure students have a wide variety of affordable plant-based choices, empowering them to make sustainable choices.
4. For the Students' Union to email students to inform them about the motion and campaign to transition to a plant-based university (which does not include catered halls), let them know how to get involved, and provide updates on progress in expanding plant-based options.
5. For the Students' Union to consult the Disability Network and allergy experts to ensure all messaging with students and lobbying with source catering is inclusive.
6. The SU to change the [Bristol's SU Accreditation](#) Point 14 to reflect offering 100% plant-based catering as an optional part of fulfilling those criteria.

Sources

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17. [Ahimsa in Daily Life | The Pluralism Project](#)
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