



Sustainable School Food Toolkit Climate-Friendly Meals



What is climate-friendly food? Healthy, climate-friendly foodservice achieves a lower carbon and water footprint than traditional foodservice. It includes a wide array of plant-based and plant-forward options. Climate-friendly foods can be sourced from local farms that offer nearby schools local, seasonal, and organic ingredients for a competitive price. With a little planning and creativity, the procurement and use of climate-friendly foods in school meal planning can help a district achieve its sustainability goals.

Try These Best Practices

There are many ways to make meals more climate-friendly and sustainable. Among them are serving more plant-based foods, more local foods, and offering foods in season.

Meatless Monday simply means that on a given day of the week (it doesn't have to be Monday!) meals served by the school do not include any meat. Reducing the amount of meat served in schools can dramatically reduce the greenhouse gas emissions caused by school meals. In place of meat, plant-based protein like beans, peas, or tofu are often used as healthy and nutritious alternatives.

Local Sourcing is another climate-friendly strategy. Purchasing food from local farmers and producers gives students access to healthy and seasonal produce. Farm-to-School programs vary based on each district's priorities, but usually include: 1) Procurement from local farms, 2) Education related to agriculture, food, health or nutrition, 3) Hands-on learning in school gardens that grow produce for the cafeteria. Visit the [Washington State Farm to School Network](#) to see examples of farm to school efforts across the state, and near you.

Success Story



Oakland Unified School District is an amazing example of how a school district can significantly reduce its carbon footprint by swapping some of the meat and dairy products it serves for plant-based foods. Not only did the district cut carbon emissions, but it also saved money. The minimal changes that were made allowed **Oakland Unified School District to save \$42,000 and reduce its food-based carbon footprint by 14% in two years** - that's over 1.3 million pounds of CO₂ per year!

If you have questions or want more information about how to adopt this practice at your school or district, contact Nancy Deming, Sustainability Manager for Oakland Unified School District, at nancy.deming@ousd.org.

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Did You Know?

Making even a single ingredient change can have huge climate impacts. For example, making tofu produces 1.66 pounds of CO₂ per pound. In comparison, a pound of beef produces [32.85 pounds of CO₂](#). You can dramatically reduce the carbon released into the atmosphere by replacing beef in a stir fry with tofu.



Resources for Taking Action!

1. [What is at the Heart of Climate-Friendly Food?](#): This resource explains climate friendly food, provides facts and figures, and gives advice on how to select and find climate friendly foods.
2. [Washington Grown Food and Recipe Kit](#): This resource provides a list of Washington-grown food products with educational tools, recipes and facts for each item.
3. [WSDA Farm to School Toolkit](#): Resources for school nutrition programs on purchasing from local farms and using Washington-grown foods in school meals
4. [Strategies for Success with Climate-Friendly School Foods](#): This resource from Friends of the Earth offers an introduction to climate-friendly school food, shares four case studies, and provides key strategies, recipes and resources.