



Earthsave Canada

SAVE THE EARTH ONE BITE AT A TIME

Earthsave Canada
#170 - 422 Richards Street
Vancouver, BC
V6B 2Z4
(604) 731-5885
<http://www.earthsave.ca>

September 9, 2020

Vancouver Food Policy Council
City Hall
453 West 12th Avenue
Vancouver, BC
V5Y 1V4

Dear Food Policy Council,

Please find attached our submission requesting that Vancouver declare itself a Good Food City. Such a declaration would commit the city to promoting sustainable agriculture with a shift towards plant-based diets.

Earthsave Canada is a Vancouver-based non-profit that, for over thirty years, has been working hard to promote a shift to such highly sustainable diets. We have long admired your extremely important, carefully conducted work and, especially, your initiatives to help reduce food waste. Like you, we do our best to employ the best available science in guiding us all towards the goal of a truly sustainable, nutritious and affordable food system.

In our submission, we highlight the very serious damage that animal agriculture does to the environment and describe its many contributions to disease as well. We note also that animal agriculture is extremely wasteful. Numerous reports have shown that we could feed far, far more people without it.

We are strongly convinced that by far the most sustainable food system would be one that minimized to the extreme the use of animal products, focusing also on growing those foods locally where practicable. We hope that you will give this careful consideration and come to agree with us.

Sincerely,

David Steele
Executive Director
Earthsave Canada

Paige Campbell
for the Board of Directors
Earthsave Canada



SECHLT FARMERS MARKET, NATHANIEL MARTIN

Reconsidering the Good Food City Declaration

Prepared for: Vancouver Food Council
Prepared by: Paige Campbell, EARTHSAVE Canada
September 8, 2020

Purpose

Food is the largest source of urban consumption-based emissions in C40 Cities¹ - the Cities Climate Leadership Group of which Vancouver is a member. Sustainable food systems that emphasize plant-based foods and reduce food waste play an integral role in improving health and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. **Cities like Vancouver have a responsibility to address food systems in their climate change strategies. So far, Vancouver's commitment in this area has been lacking.**

While dozens of other cities, including Toronto, signed the Good Food City Declaration at the 2019 C40 Mayor's summit in Copenhagen, Vancouver quietly abstained.

By recognizing that compared to other dietary patterns, plant-based diets offer the greatest environmental and health outcomes², Vancouver could join the ranks of other Canadian cities committed to this goal, and take bold action toward creating the greenest, healthiest city by 2050.

We encourage the Vancouver Food Council and City Council to reconsider their choice and pledge to become a Good Food City, in line with Vancouver's goal to be the greenest city in the world and show leadership among the global C40 cities.

Background

To date, Vancouver City Council has omitted meaningful and evidence-based food systems action from their climate strategies while seemingly taking no further action to learn about or find solutions.

In October 2019 at the C40 Summit in Copenhagen, the City of Vancouver failed to sign on to the Good Food Declaration, which aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through dietary change and food waste reduction. This was despite Vancouver City Council voting unanimously to declare a Climate Emergency³ earlier in the year on January 16, 2019 with an aim to embrace available tools to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The Climate Emergency Response Report recognizes the opportunity for encouraging plant-based diets based on their low-carbon properties, citing **“based on the City's analysis of these additional sources of carbon pollution, priority opportunities include** transitioning to lower-carbon building and construction materials, **and encouraging residents and restaurants to shift to more plant-based diets, which are less carbon intensive to produce.”**⁴ It refers to these types of emissions as embodied, or Scope 3 emissions. Despite this recognition, the report later omits immediate action on sustainable food systems and chooses to focus on construction and building related embodied emissions because “staff do not have a clear enough picture of how much [food-related emissions] can be reduced or what the most appropriate roles are for the City to articulate a meaningful Big Move for food consumption. Staff will continue to monitor and pursue this opportunity as these plans are reviewed and updated.”⁵

The scientific consensus on the link between plant-based diets and reduced greenhouse gas emissions is well established and even described in Canada's updated Food Guide⁶. It recognizes that "An eating pattern that is higher in plant-based foods and lower in animal-based foods can decrease the negative impact of food on the environment. In general, plant-based foods use fewer resources such as land and water" and recommends Canadians "choose plant-based foods more often."

In 2017, emissions associated with food consumption in C40 cities accounted for the largest consumption-based emissions: an estimated 13% of cities' total greenhouse gas emissions, with the consumption of animal-sourced food representing roughly 75% of these emissions⁷. Encouraging plant-based diets that minimize waste represent the ideal way to lessen the global burden of chronic diseases while simultaneously vastly reducing the negative environmental impacts of food production.

Furthermore, an estimated one-third of all food produced globally is either lost or wasted. If global food waste were a country, it would be the largest greenhouse gas emitter after China and the United States. Food waste comes at a cost of nearly USD\$900 billion each year. In Canada, 58% of food produced is wasted and is a CAD\$49 billion opportunity; in British Columbia alone, the cost of food wasted in hotels and restaurants is worth 57% more than the profits earned in these industries⁸. The Good Food Declaration includes a commitment to reduce food waste to help reduce expenditure, resources, and carbon emissions.

Benefits of Plant-Based Diets

Many factors go into creating healthy and sustainable cities, and it can be difficult to balance these considerations⁹. However, two things are clear. First, Council should incorporate evidence-based nutrition in its policymaking to reduce the burden of chronic diseases on the public^{10,11}. Second, Council is responsible for understanding and advocating for climate change mitigation on behalf of the public. Fortunately, these two goals work together, as the same dietary choices that are excellent for our health are also the best food choices for our planet — plant-based diets¹².

Among the largest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions is the livestock industry, in addition to creating a myriad of other environmental burdens^{13,14,15}. Plant-based diets replace animal foods with plant foods, and significantly reduce harmful environmental impacts while improving health outcomes^{16,17}.

Food choices play a critical role in local and global greenhouse gas emissions, land use conversion, water quality degradation, and also contribute to the global burden of disease. Now more than ever, municipalities must take action to facilitate and encourage sustainable consumption. Plant-based food choices — void of animal components like meat, dairy, and eggs — are not only the most environmentally sustainable, but help prevent and reduce communicable zoonotic disease transmission and non-communicable disease risk.

Plant-based diets significantly reduce several of the world's largest environmental and health concerns, including:

- Cardiovascular and chronic disease: Animal-based diets are naturally high in trans fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol which contribute to cardiovascular disease, type-II diabetes, and obesity risk^{18,19,20,21,22,23,24}.
- Antimicrobial resistance: A significant portion of antibiotic use world-wide is on livestock and in fisheries and contributes to antibiotic resistance²⁵. Antibiotic-resistant bacterial infections kill 700,000 humans each year²⁶ and threaten our entire modern healthcare system if we do not have well-functioning antibiotics for human use.
- Zoonotic viruses: Animal agriculture and consumption has played prominent roles in the emergence of zoonotic viruses including CoVID-19, SARS, MERS, Smallpox, Bird Flu, Swine Flu, and Influenza²⁷.
- Deforestation: The leading cause of deforestation worldwide is livestock production by both direct pasture use and conversion of forest to feed crops for livestock^{28,29,30}.
- Freshwater use: Agriculture accounts for 70% of global freshwater use, most of which is used for livestock production^{21,25}.
- Water pollution: Livestock waste run-off, fishery waste, and pesticide residue from fodder crops contribute to water pollution and eutrophication^{21,25,28}.
- Biodiversity loss: Livestock land use and marine uses of fisheries and aquaculture are the leading cause of biodiversity loss^{25,28}.
- World hunger: We currently grow more than enough edible crops to feed the current and estimated 10 billion population expected in coming years and eliminate world hunger. Instead choose to feed most of these crops to livestock animals, and lose much to spoilage and waste³¹.
- Agricultural worker mental health concerns: Slaughterhouse workers face significant rates of stress, anxiety, domestic violence, workplace accidents, and pPTSD (perpetrator-induced post-traumatic stress disorder) due to the violent, repetitive, traumatic, and dangerous nature of their work^{32,33}.

There is no ambiguity: plant-based diets are needed now more than ever to halt environmental degradation, chronic disease trends, and zoonotic virus growth for a sustainable future.

Recommendation

EARTHSAVE Canada asks for the Vancouver Food Policy Council's support in requesting the Vancouver City Council sign the C40 Good Food City Declaration as a meaningful action toward creating and maintaining sustainable food systems in municipal health & sustainability goals.

Endnotes

- ¹ "Consumption Based Emissions of C40 Cities," *C40 Cities*, March 2018, <https://www.c40.org/researches/consumption-based-emissions> (accessed June 15, 2020).
- ² Creating a Sustainable Food Future: A Menu of Solutions to Feed Nearly 10 Billion People by 2050. Synthesis Report, December 2018. wri.org.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/creating-sustainable-food-future_2.pdf?_ga=2.25131827.805282561.1557936890-711935629.1551727170.
- ³ Global News, by Robyn Crawford. Vancouver City Council votes to declare 'climate emergency' <https://globalnews.ca/news/4856517/vancouver-city-council-votes-to-declare-climate-emergency/> (accessed June 15, 2020)
- ⁴ Vancouver City Council: Climate Emergency Response <https://council.vancouver.ca/20190424/documents/cfsc1.pdf> (accessed June 15, 2020)
- ⁵ *ibid.*
- ⁶ Canada Food Guide, <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/healthy-eating-recommendations/make-it-a-habit-to-eat-vegetables-fruit-whole-grains-and-protein-foods/> (accessed June 15, 2020)
- ⁷ C40, 2019, In Focus: Addressing food related consumption in C40 cities https://www.c40knowledgehub.org/s/article/In-Focus-Addressing-food-related-consumption-based-emissions-in-C40-Cities?language=en_US (accessed June 15, 2020)
- ⁸ British Columbia, Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy. Foodservice Food Waste Prevention. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/environment/waste-management/organic-waste/toolkits/part_1_toolkit_report-foodservice.pdf (Accessed June 15, 2020)
- ⁹ Canada. Public Health. Designing Healthy Living: The Chief Public Health Officer's Report on the State of Public Health in Canada. October 2017. 1-74.
- ¹⁰ GBD 2017 Diet Collaborators. Health effects of dietary risks in 195 countries, 1990–2017: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2017. *The Lancet*. 2 April 2019. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(19)30041-8.
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- ¹² Searchinger, Tim, Richard Waite, Craig Hanson, Janet Ranganathan, and Patrice Dumas. Creating a Sustainable Food Future: A Menu of Solutions to Feed Nearly 10 Billion People by 2050. Synthesis Report, December 2018. Edited by Emily Matthews. Accessed June 15, 2020. wri.org.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/creating-sustainable-food-future_2.pdf?_ga=2.25131827.805282561.1557936890-711935629.1551727170.
- ¹³ *ibid.*
- ¹⁴ Food and Agriculture Organization, Livestock's Long Shadow: Environmental Issues and Options, accessed June 15, 2020, <http://www.fao.org/3/a0701e/a0701e.pdf>.
- ¹⁵ Food and Agriculture Organization. 2019. The State of the World's Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture, J. Bélanger & D. Pilling (eds.). FAO Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture Assessments. Rome, accessed June 15, 2020, www.fao.org/3/CA3129EN/CA3129EN.pdf
- ¹⁶ Diet, Nutrition and the Prevention of Chronic Diseases: Report of the Joint WHO/FAO Expert Consultation, World Health Organization, October 06, 2014, accessed June 20, 2020, www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/publications/trs916/summary/en/.
- ¹⁷ Searchinger, Tim, Richard Waite, Craig Hanson, Janet Ranganathan, and Patrice Dumas. Creating a Sustainable Food Future: A Menu of Solutions to Feed Nearly 10 Billion People by 2050. Synthesis Report, December 2018. Edited by Emily Matthews. Accessed June 20, 2020 wri.org.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/creating-sustainable-food-future_2.pdf?_ga=2.25131827.805282561.1557936890-711935629.1551727170.
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- ²⁰ Diet, Nutrition and the Prevention of Chronic Diseases: Report of the Joint WHO/FAO Expert Consultation," World Health Organization
- ²¹ Creating a Sustainable Food Future: A Menu of Solutions to Feed Nearly 10 Billion People by 2050. WRI
- ²² Health Status of Canadians 2016: Report of the Chief Public Health Officer.
- ²³ Vartiainen, Erkki. "The North Karelia Project: Cardiovascular Disease Prevention in Finland." *Global Cardiology Science and Practice* 2018, no. 2 (June 23, 2018). Accessed June 20, 2020. doi:10.21542/gcsp.2018.13.
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²⁵ Food and Agriculture Organization, *Livestock's Long Shadow: Environmental Issues and Options*

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³³ Fitzgerald, A., Kalof, L., Dietz, T. Research Article. "Slaughterhouses and Increased Crime Rates: An Empirical Analysis of the Spillover From 'The Jungle' Into the Surrounding Community." *Organization and Environment*, June 2009. doi: 10.1177/1086026609338164