

## **PLANT BASED FOOD OPTIONS AT SCHOOL MEALS**

Adopted by the Statewide Annual Meeting Delegates April 2022

- WHEREAS,** There is a disproportionately high percentage of pupils who are students of color (including but not limited to: Black, Hispanic, American Indian, Pacific Islander) living in poverty and thus eligible for free or reduced-price lunches through the National School Lunch Program; and
- WHEREAS,** Subsidized school meals are a central strategy for addressing food security among young people in the United States and students are entitled to the same availability, accessibility and adequacy of food that are required through California law for people in other public institutions, which requires providing a diversity of healthy meals, including plant-based meals<sup>1</sup> that are acceptable to most religions, those with ethical dietary beliefs, and those with known food sensitivities; and
- WHEREAS,** The American Medical Association has asked for changes in federal school lunch program requirements in recognition of the fact that genetic research has shown that lactose intolerance is a common and normal condition among many Americans, especially African Americans, Asian Americans, and Native Americans, and that it is mainly people of northern European descent who can easily process the lactose in milk; and
- WHEREAS,** According to the American Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, vegetarians and vegans, defined as those following a plant-based diet, are at reduced risk of certain health conditions, including obesity, ischemic heart disease, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and certain types of cancer; and
- WHEREAS,** Food systems have been identified as one of the most significant contributors to environmental problems, with meat production and consumption imposing the highest proportions of these environmental costs by contributing to waste, energy and water consumption, biodiversity loss, and greenhouse gas emissions, while plant-based food production has been proven to be significantly more sustainable; now therefore be it
- RESOLVED,** That California State PTA and its units, councils and districts support legislation, regulations and/or other measures to provide plant-based options for school meals so that all students have access to healthy meal options that meet their diverse needs, while mitigating environmental impacts; and be it further.
- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA urge its units, councils and districts to work with their local school districts to ensure that plant-based options are provided for all school meals; and be it further
- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA submit this resolution to the National PTA for consideration by the delegates at its convention.

<sup>1</sup> “Plant-based meals” are defined as entire meals that contain no animal products or byproducts, including meat, poultry, fish, dairy, or eggs.

## **Background Summary**

This resolution seeks to engage PTA members, and their communities, in a concerted effort to advocate for and encourage school efforts to provide equitable access to nutritious meals, decrease detrimental health effects to children, and reduce climate change through the food schools have available. Schools should provide a plant-based meal option for all school meals offered.

School meals and the nutritional policies governing them have catered to mostly Northern European people. Food allergies and dietary restrictions that are common in minority demographics have largely been overlooked. Students who have moral or religious reasons for not consuming meat and dairy should not be discriminated against by schools not providing plant-based food options. Plant-based meals are the most universally accepted foods for the diversity of cultures, religions, and food allergies with which students identify.

Meat consumption has significant detrimental health effects. Higher meat intake is associated with increased risk of cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes, and some forms of cancer. Conversely, a plant-based diet is associated with a 26% reduction in coronary heart disease and a 41% reduction in Type II diabetes when compared to a conventional omnivorous diet. As childhood obesity and chronic diseases continue to increase nationwide, students should have the option for a healthier plant-based meal option at school that is not associated with higher disease rates, in accordance with CA PTA Resolution entitled “Healthy Lifestyles For AllChildren.”

Our children are most vulnerable to the hazards of climate change. In 2015, California State PTA adopted a resolution entitled “Climate Change is a Children’s Issue,” that urged “school districts to support programs and strategies to make schools more climate-safe and energy efficient models.” Research since then shows the urgency with which we must act to conserve water, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and decrease deforestation. As institutions focused on serving children, schools have a responsibility to participate in and even lead these efforts.

Food systems have been identified as one of the most significant contributors to current environmental problems. Meat production and consumption imposes the highest proportion of these environmental costs, indirectly contributing to waste, energy and water consumption, biodiversity loss, and greenhouse gas emissions. Plant-based food production has been proven to be significantly more sustainable. This resolution is in accordance with the National PTA Environmental Health, Remediation, Sustainability and Climate Change position statement.

A recent two-year pilot program at Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) showed that serving more plant-based meals resulted in a 14% reduction in the carbon footprint of their food program, 6% reduction in water footprint, and \$42,000 in cost savings annually. Providing plant-based meal options has been proven to improve children’s lives and environmental footprint while reducing costs to schools.