



 **proveg**
SCHOOL
PLATES

THE GUIDE

HOW **SMALL CHANGES**
 CAN HAVE A **BIG IMPACT**
 ON CHILDREN'S HEALTH
 AND OUR PLANET



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Welcome!

YOUR JOURNEY STARTS HERE



As an ambassador for ProVeg UK's School Plates programme, I'm thrilled to introduce you to **THE GUIDE**, a comprehensive, evidence-based guide to helping you transform school meals into healthier, more sustainable alternatives. This useful resource includes everything you need to know about plant-based school food – what it is, why it's necessary, and how to include more of it on your menus.

I've dedicated my professional life to protecting and conserving the natural environment, and advocating for a more harmonious relationship between humans and nature. One of the most significant ways in which we can foster this harmony is through our food choices. The impact of our diets extends far beyond our own health – our food systems play a crucial role in the health of our planet and the future we're building for our children. Our schools are responsible for guiding the next generation towards more sustainable behaviours and habits, so it's crucial that school menus reflect this shift, safeguarding our children's futures and equipping them with the knowledge they need to make more informed choices.

The Guide is designed for school caterers who are ready to lead this essential transformation in our school-food systems. It's packed with practical advice on how to seamlessly integrate child-friendly, plant-based meals – that children will love – into school menus, and thus reduce your food emissions. We've included comprehensive nutritional information in order to ensure that these meals meet the highest standards of health and well-being. And we also looked at the latest research and insights in behavioural science in order to promote the uptake and success of these new menu additions.

Beyond the immediate benefits of improved nutrition and taste, there are profound environmental advantages to embracing plant-based meals. By reducing our reliance on animal-based products, we can significantly lower greenhouse gas emissions, conserve water, and reduce deforestation. The schools adopting these principles are at the forefront of a critical shift towards a more sustainable future.



Educating children about plant-based diets opens up a world of learning – about where our food comes from, how it affects our bodies, and the impact of our food choices on the health of the planet. It's an opportunity to instil values of sustainability and health that will stay with them for a lifetime.

I'm incredibly proud to support the School Plates programme. By following the advice and principles outlined in this guide, schools can influence healthier lifestyles and encourage more planet-friendly food choices. Let's make a difference together, one school plate at a time!

Chris Packham



WHAT IS SCHOOL PLATES?

WELCOME! AND A HUGE THANK YOU FOR BEING OPEN TO HEALTHIER AND MORE SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL MEALS.

Like you, we care passionately about the food we serve to school children. We want them to thrive, nourished by good food that they love. We also care deeply about the future of our planet and know that we need to change the way we cook and eat if we are to address the climate crisis.

Our School Plates programme supports local authorities, multi-academy trusts, individual schools, and contract caterers. We focus on helping you to make **small changes** to school menus that can have a **big impact** on our children's health and the health of the planet.

We do this through our **free services**, which help you to:

-  Increase the uptake of existing plant-rich meals.
-  Increase the quantity and quality of plant-rich dishes.
-  Optimise plant-to-meat meal ratios on your menus.
-  Track data to show positive impact to share with your team and community.
-  Inspire innovative culinary approaches and upgrade skills.
-  Connect and network with other caterers for peer-to-peer learning and support.
-  Change the dietary habits of children now – and for generations to come.

Throughout this guide, we'll explain **who** is behind this programme and **why** we do this work, along with an in-depth exploration of the how, in order to guide you through your plant-forward journey step-by-step.

We take a gentle and pragmatic approach to change. Because this is your journey, we meet you where you are and help you to reach your goals at a pace that is right for you.

The actions we recommend you to take are all evidence-based and tried-and-tested for success.

For the various ways that you can get started, please see the free services we offer and some ideas you might like to try on **page 16** in the 'How' section.

The time is right to make a positive shift in school meals now. We know from all the feedback we have received in recent years that children, parents, and the wider school community are ready for it.

We're excited to start working with you!



WHO WE ARE + HOW TO JOIN THE SCHOOL FOOD REVOLUTION

ProVeg UK is part of a much larger organisation, ProVeg International, a global food awareness organisation operating in 14 countries across five continents. In the UK, we focus on making school food healthier and more sustainable by supporting local authorities, multi-academy trusts, individual schools, and contract caterers through our successful School Plates programme.

PROVEG UK

SCHOOL PLATES¹

75

Over **75 major catering partners** throughout the UK, including local authorities, multi-academy trusts, and catering companies. We are working with or have supported over **1/3 of all UK local authorities**.

7k

Over **7,000 schools** are now benefitting from healthier and more sustainable school menus.

1.2m

Over **1.2 million children** eat from these menus every day.

37m

Over **37 million meals** made healthier and more planet-friendly (changed to meat-free or plant-based).

Specialist Regional Coordinators for England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales.

✓

Meets the Following Nutrition Standards:

England: School Food Standards (SFS)

Scotland: Healthy Eating in Schools

Northern Ireland: Nutritional Standards for School Lunches

Wales: Healthy Eating in Maintained Schools

★

School Plates Awards, with caterers achieving Bronze, Silver and Gold Awards.

🌱

Plant-Based Recipes, featuring 70 recipes designed specifically for primary schools.

👤

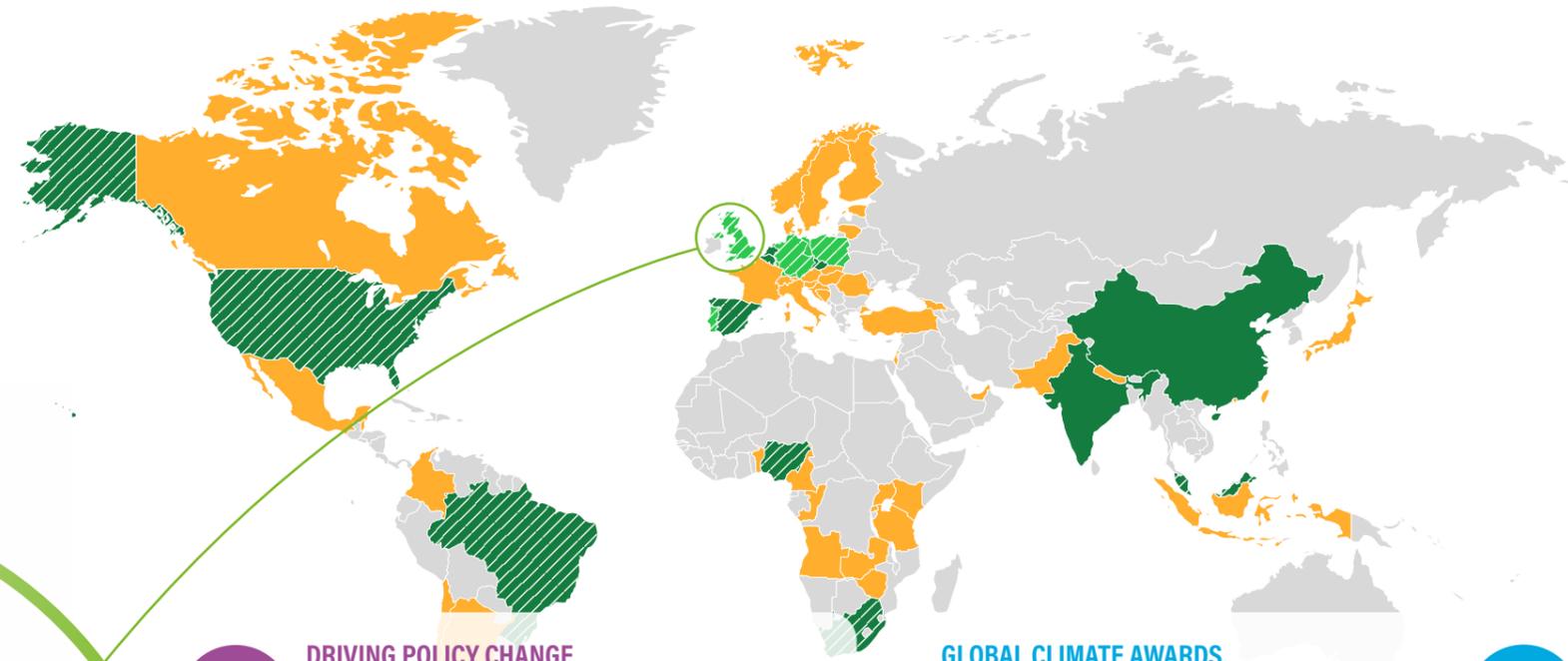
Plant-Based Cooking in Schools Workshops, both in-person and online.

🏠

School Plates Network meetings for peer-to-peer support from other caterers in our network.

PROVEG INTERNATIONAL COUNTRIES & SCHOOL FOOD PROGRAMMES

- ProVeg countries
- ProVeg school programmes
- Global Plant-Based School Food Network countries



DRIVING POLICY CHANGE

We continue to meet with the UK Department for Education as we move closer to more sustainable nutritional guidelines for school food in England, thereby supporting the UK government's commitment to reaching net zero by 2050.



GLOBAL PLANT-BASED SCHOOL FOOD NETWORK

Beyond the UK, we have established the Global Plant-Based School Food Network, which is rapidly expanding. Although the network has only been running for just over a year, it already comprises **60 organisations from 45 countries** – across 5 continents and over 17 time zones. Members range from volunteer-led grassroots programmes to non-government organisations to experts in national government departments. The fast growth of the network is accelerating the pace of change in school catering worldwide, through the sharing of best practices and impact-evaluation frameworks centred around the sustainability, nutrition, and affordability of plant-based school meals. Additionally, we had the opportunity to **showcase our programme at COP28** in Dubai, where we engaged with policymakers and delegates from all over the world.

GLOBAL CLIMATE AWARDS

In 2018, ProVeg was awarded the **UN's Momentum for Change award**, in recognition of our climate-focused school programmes.² The award recognises examples of innovative, transformative, and scalable climate actions around the world. In 2024, ProVeg was granted observer status at the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, which focuses on supporting the world ecosystems, supporting both planetary and individual health.³



RECOGNITION

The School Plates programme was nominated for the Earthshot Prize 2024 and was a finalist in the Excellence in School Food Awards 2022, facilitated by the All Party Parliamentary Group on School Food. The media also continues to show interest in our work, with features in leading national newspapers. Check out our features on page 38.



¹ Based on estimated overall impact data – end of June 2024 School Plates Q2 data.

SUSTAINABILITY

MOVING TOWARDS PLANT-RICH DIETS IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPACTFUL ACTIONS WE CAN TAKE TO REDUCE OUR ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINT. WE NEED TO EAT MORE PLANTS AND LESS MEAT AND DAIRY, FOR THE FUTURE OF OUR PLANET.

Reducing greenhouse gases and mitigating climate change requires a holistic approach that includes food systems. Even if we stopped emissions from all fossil fuels right now, emissions from food production alone would take us well beyond the carbon budget for 1.5°C. This is why it is both essential and urgent that we address our food choices.⁴

Every year, we're seeing more independent reports from a range of institutions – including the UN,⁵ academic institutions,⁶ policy think tanks,⁷ and environmental organisations⁸ – all calling for a shift towards a more plant-based food system.

The Government's official advisory panel for climate change, the Climate Change Committee (CCC), has called for a **20% shift away from meat** by 2030, rising to **35% by 2050**, and a **20% shift away from dairy products by 2030, in order to put the UK on the path to net zero**. The CCC highlights the fact that we need to reduce our consumption of all types of meat, not just red meat.⁹

DID YOU KNOW?

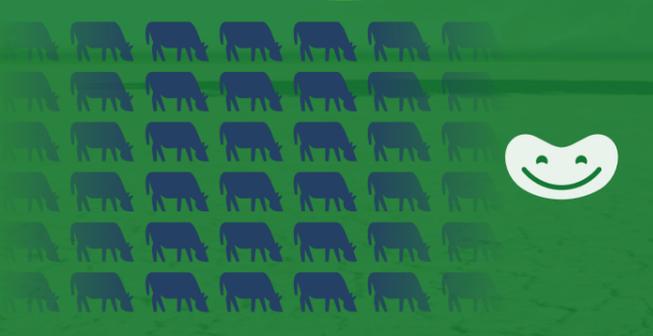
Farming animals for food has a significant impact on the climate:⁸

- Animal farming is responsible for up to 20% of global greenhouse gas emissions.
- It is the leading cause of deforestation, biodiversity loss, and species extinction and is incredibly water-intensive.
- Beef emits 50 times more greenhouse gases per gram of protein than pulses such as beans and lentils.¹¹

These environmental changes affect our ability to produce high-quality foods, further compromising food security and nutrition.¹²

“ Reaching net zero is very difficult without a switch to more plant-based diets ”

Godfray H. Charles, Joseph Poore and Hannah Ritchie X University of Oxford and Our World in Data.¹⁰



SHIFTING TO SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL FOOD



Impact of school food

- **The climate impact of our food is being recognised at a regional level.** Over 90% of local authorities in the UK have declared a climate emergency. In England, nearly two-thirds of councils aim to achieve carbon-neutral status by 2030, which is 20 years earlier than the national target. Many of these local authorities are seeking to address the climate crisis through food, and are working with us through our School Plates programme.
- **Schools play a huge part in this collective effort.** It is estimated that UK schools serve around 1.2 billion meals every year.¹³⁻¹⁶ with most of those meals containing animal-based products.



Embracing more plants and less meat

- Plant-based diets generally have a carbon footprint that is up to **50% lower** than current average diets.

Relative impact of diets



- **Plant-based products** have a smaller carbon footprint than their animal-based counterparts – up to **90%** in some cases.
- **The biggest difference we can make is to eat more plant-based sources of protein such as tofu, nuts, peas, and beans.**¹⁸



Planet-friendly plate

- A sustainable diet emphasises the importance of eating a diverse range of plant-based foods and reducing animal-based products such as meat and dairy. **The Planetary Health Plate¹⁷ illustrates this by advocating for half the plate to be fruits and vegetables, with the remainder divided between whole grains, plant proteins, unsaturated plant oils, and just a small amount of animal protein.**
- Our School Plates recipes are all low or very low carbon – **four times lower than a typical meat-based school lunch.**



Is locally-sourced food the answer?

- When it comes to reducing the climate impact of our diets, the type of food we eat is the most important factor, regardless of whether it is locally sourced or imported. This is because emissions from the production of food far outweigh the emissions from the food's transportation. So it's what you eat that matters the most, not how far your food has travelled.¹⁹

If you want to reduce the carbon footprint of your food, then focus on WHAT you eat, not whether your food is local.¹⁹

CHILDREN'S HEALTH

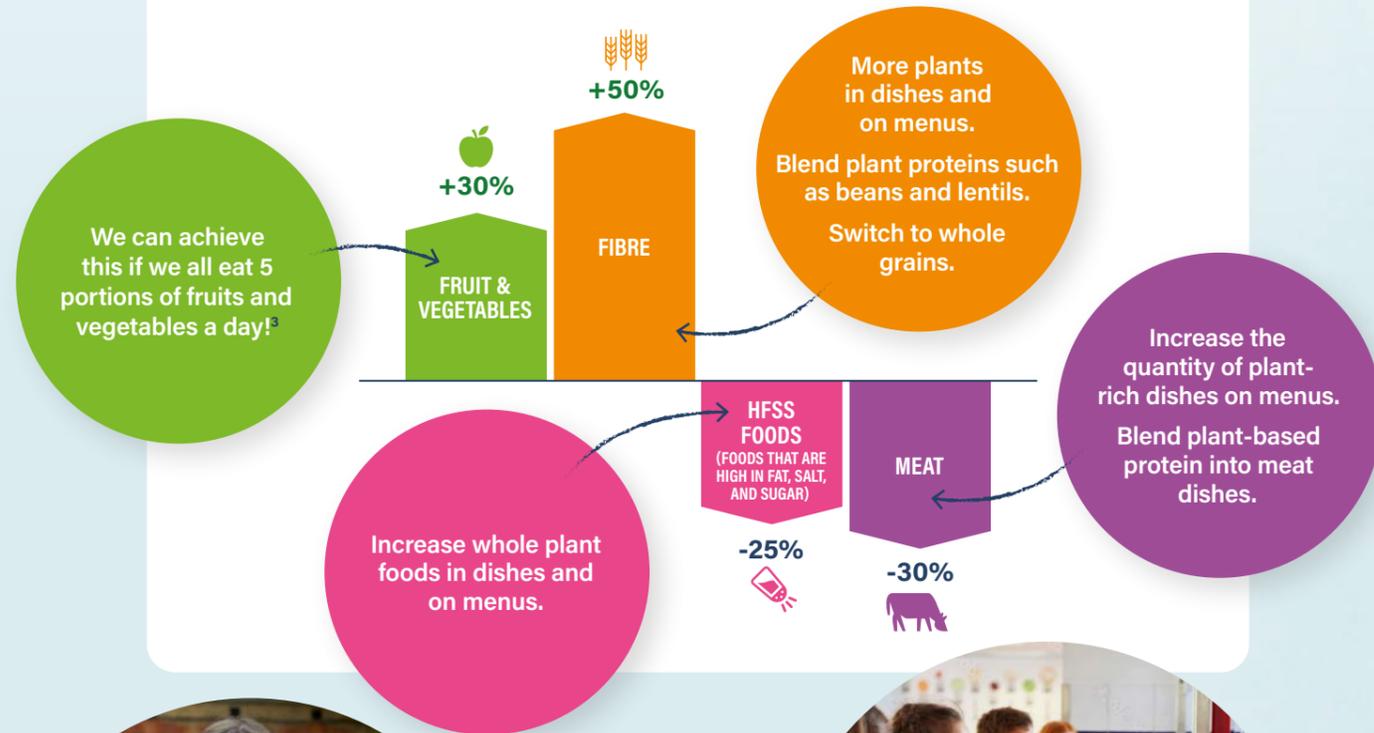
We care deeply about the health and well-being of our children and communities, and we recognise that our individual and collective health is fundamentally connected to the food we eat and the environment we live in.

CHILDREN'S NUTRITIONAL NEEDS

Children require nutrient-dense foods in order to fuel their rapid growth and development. Whole plant foods are rich in essential vitamins and minerals, as well as fibre and antioxidants, all of which are crucial for maintaining optimum health.

Whole foods such as beans and lentils and plant-based foods such as tofu and soya mince are also good sources of protein. A diet based around a diverse range of whole foods with low levels of saturated fat can support children in maintaining a healthy weight, while also reducing the risk of a range of lifestyle diseases.

The National Food Strategy,²⁰ an independent government-commissioned review of the UK's food system, underscores the urgency of integrating more plant-based whole foods and fibre into our diets in order to combat the growing tide of health issues linked to poor nutrition. It includes the following headline changes to the UK's national diet by 2032 (compared to 2019).²¹



HEALTHY CHILDREN

Reducing the risk of lifestyle diseases

Eating a well-balanced, plant-based diet is associated with a reduced risk of many lifestyle diseases, including obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and some forms of cancer.²⁴

Processed meat such as sausages, bacon, and ham are classified by the World Health Organisation as a Group 1 carcinogen (this classification means there is sufficient evidence that these foods cause cancer). Red meat is classified as a Group 2A carcinogen (meaning that foods such as beef, veal, and pork are likely to cause cancer).²⁵ Red meat and processed meats have the most negative impacts on both human health and the environment.²⁶



HEALTHY WEIGHT

Preventing obesity and associated health risks

Reducing childhood obesity is regarded by the World Health Organisation as a serious public health challenge.²²

According to the National Child Measurement Programme,²³ 9.2% of reception-aged children (age 4-5) and 22.7% of children in year 6 (age 10-11) in England are obese.

There's a strong link between higher levels of deprivation and increased obesity rates, particularly among boys.



HEALTHY GUT

Increasing plants and fibre to support health

Around a third of children eat one or less than one portion of vegetables a day.²⁷

Most children are fibre deficient, with only 18% of children aged 5-15 years eating the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables a day.

Fibre from a diverse range of plant-based whole foods supports a healthy gut microbiome and also helps to reduce the risk of several diseases.²⁸

We need more fibre and less sugar in our diet.²⁹

ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS AND PLANT-RICH FOOD IN SCHOOLS



Ultra-processed foods (UPFs) and their impact on health have been gaining a lot of attention in recent years. However, the degree of processing alone cannot be used to make a reliable assessment about the health value of a specific food. Some nutritious foods that most of us consider to be healthy fall into the processed/ultra-processed categories – for example, store-bought wholegrain bread, which although classed as processed, offers important benefits such as fibre and essential nutrients.

Numerous studies have shown that plant-based alternatives can have multiple health benefits and a lower environmental impact than their animal-based counterparts.³⁰⁻³⁷ They can be a great way to reduce meat content in dishes and offer familiar alternatives to children. However, it's important to read the labels in order to ensure that they are low in salt, fat, and sugar, and meet the nutritional standards for school food.

While plant-based meat alternatives can be beneficial, focusing on whole foods and traditional plant-based processed foods such as tofu offers the most nutritious alternatives to meat.³⁸



INCLUSIVITY

MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF CATERING FOR A WIDE RANGE OF NEEDS AND PREFERENCES.

Because meal times are about more than just the food we eat – they are an opportunity for connection, relaxation, and enjoyment - focusing on the ways that we can encourage inclusion is key to optimising wellbeing.

Plant-based meals (free from dairy, eggs, fish, and meat) can provide a more inclusive option for children, accommodating a wide range of dietary preferences and restrictions. Plant-based recipes tend to avoid many of the most common allergens and are usually also appropriate for children who follow religious, cultural, vegetarian, or vegan diets.

Kosher foods include “all products that grow in the soil or on plants, bushes, or trees”,³⁹ while foods that are Halal include all fruits and vegetables.⁴⁰

By providing a single meal that caters for a wide range of dietary needs and preferences, schools and caterers can simplify meal planning, save time, and reduce costs. This approach ensures that no child feels left out or different, and fosters respect, inclusivity, and a sense of belonging.



SAVE MONEY

WE KNOW WHAT YOU'RE THINKING: "WHAT WILL THIS COST?"

With budgets tighter than ever and food costs rising, we recognise this is a legitimate concern. But here's the good news: plant-based ingredients and meals are often more affordable than meat and meat-based dishes.

This is because animal-based products are among the most expensive food items we buy (which makes sense, since they are far more resource intensive). By including more plant-based foods and dishes on your menu and reducing meat-based ingredients and options, you can save money.

Whole plant-based foods, in particular, are often considerably more affordable than their meat-based alternatives. For example, chickpeas are far cheaper than chicken, and lentils cost only a small fraction of the price of minced beef!

Many of our partners have reported that adding more plant-based dishes to their menus helps them save money. One academy trust saved 7% at Bronze Award level and another saved 20% at Silver! See page 18 for more information on our awards.

COMPARISON: MEAT-BASED VS PLANT-BASED

Let's take a look at a familiar dish on school menus – Spaghetti Bolognese – and compare the meat-based and plant-based versions. Being aware of how each version stacks up in terms of cost, health benefits, and sustainability is key to making informed decisions about the direction of school menus.

SPAGHETTI BOLOGNESE

Made with 50g beef mince per portion and served with 55g wholewheat spaghetti



COST	72 p
FIBRE	7.3 g
PROTEIN	19.3 g
SATURATED FAT	4 g
CO2 EMISSIONS	2.26 kg, Very high

SPAGHETTI BOLOGNESE (VE)

Made with 30g lentils and 20g dried soya mince per portion and served with 55g wholewheat spaghetti



COST	41 p
FIBRE	9.5 g
PROTEIN	22 g
SATURATED FAT	0.5g
CO2 EMISSIONS	0.75 kg, Low



A POWERFUL COMPARISON

It's clear that the plant-based Spaghetti Bolognese performs better than the meat-based version in all the categories above. And it's an easy switch – the plant-based dish comes out on top simply by replacing the minced beef with soya mince and lentils.



A BLENDED APPROACH

INCORPORATING PLANT PROTEINS INTO MEAT DISHES

Blending beans, lentils, and alternative plant proteins into meat-based dishes is a simple and popular change with a big impact. Making menu items more plant-based doesn't have to be all or nothing – adding plant-based protein is a subtle and effective way of helping children to increase diversity of plants and boost fibre intake.

Top Tip

Start by blending plant proteins into dishes containing minced meat or chunks of meat. This is a successful, evidence-based technique for boosting fibre and lowering emissions in meat-based dishes. See page 29 for more information and key facts about this popular approach.

DIRECTION OF CHANGE



With more and more people embracing plant-based foods, the shift is also gaining momentum in the public sector. A government campaign was launched in 2020 to reduce the amount of meat served in the public sector by 20%.⁴¹ The campaign attracted widespread support from the school food sector, including LACA and ASSIST FM.

A recent study found that **over 80% of public-sector caterers** have committed to meat reduction, with 83% committing to increasing plant proteins by 20%.⁴²

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES CARE ABOUT OUR PLANET

A YouGov survey found that nearly two-thirds (63%) of 11-to-18-year-olds thought that the environment and climate change was one of the most important issues for the country. Those in the survey who wanted to eat less meat also said they wanted to see more meat-free options available at school, since they're not always able to influence shopping habits at home.⁴³



In a survey by the Children's Food Campaign, UK parents overwhelmingly support extending healthy school meals to all children and want more nutritious, planet-friendly options on school menus.⁴⁴

Recent data from a public attitude survey by Eating Better reveals that **61% of people want to reduce their meat consumption** due to concerns about the environment and animal welfare, as well as due to financial considerations. Additionally, **78% of respondents want to see healthier food in schools**, and **75% want to protect nature and biodiversity** in order to support food production in the future.⁴⁵



HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL FOOD FOR ALL

ZOOMING IN ON SCHOOL FOOD ACROSS THE UK'S FOUR NATIONS

The UK government must work to align its school food policies with the urgent demands for healthier, more climate-friendly options, reflecting the changing perceptions of children and families. Here we zoom in on each of the four nations (England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales) to get a snapshot of what is happening in each country in terms of sustainable school food.

ENGLAND



The current School Food Standards in England set out specific guidance on sustainability, encouraging a **weekly meat-free day in schools**, and allowing up to two meat-free days per week.⁴⁶

NORTHERN IRELAND



Northern Ireland's Climate Change Act supports nature-based projects that focus on enhancing biodiversity and moving towards a more resilient climate.⁴⁷

SCOTLAND



The Scottish Good Food Nation plan⁴⁸ aims to provide **healthier and sustainable food options** for all ages, support food security, and promote a flourishing natural environment that restores biodiversity, and optimises animal welfare and net-zero ambitions.

Additional initiatives and projects in Scotland and Wales involve connecting with public procurement to drive wider sustainability goals.^{49, 50, 51}

WALES



Public Health Wales recommends establishing criteria for sustainable school food as well as guidance for **sustainable school-menu development** and eating principles.⁵¹

A report on school food in Wales emphasises the importance of healthy school-food programmes that **promote access to nutritious and sustainable food**.⁵²

UNIVERSAL FREE SCHOOL MEALS

The rollout of universal free school meals for primary school pupils in different parts of the UK is a pivotal opportunity for local authorities and governments to increase access to plant-rich meals on menus, nurture children's health, and cultivate a sustainable future for all.

We are here to support you on your plant-forward journey, matching the pace of change to fit the needs of your schools and communities, and helping you achieve your climate and health goals.



IMPACTFUL WAYS TO START YOUR SUSTAINABLE FOOD JOURNEY



We have lots of ways to get you started on your sustainability journey.

Where you start needs to be based on what is right for you, your school caterers, and your community.

IDEAS TO GET YOU STARTED



LEARN MORE
Sign up to receive our [newsletter](#).



CONNECT WITH PEERS
Join our network meeting and learn how other caterers are implementing changes.



NEW RECIPES
Access our [free recipes](#) to try with your school, climate project or catering team.



DEVELOP NEW SKILLS
Book an in-person workshop or [access our online workshops and training sessions](#).



CONNECT WITH US
Invite us to share more about School Plates in a webinar or to speak at your event.



MENU CONSULTATION
Send us your menu for free analysis and support.



MORE VEG AND FIBRE

- ✓ Blend veg into sauces.
- ✓ Try blending beans and lentils into a popular meat dish.



TASTE-TESTING
Host a plant-rich taste-testing event at an open day to get feedback from the school community.



PLANT-RICH DAY
Try a plant-rich day (meat-free and fish-free) once a week.



MEASURE IMPACT
Complete our short partner survey by supplying some simple information about your school meals and your organisation.



EDUCATE AND EMPOWER
Encourage your school(s) to access and [download the free teaching resources and lesson plans](#).

WHAT WE OFFER



SCHOOL PLATES NEWSLETTER
Get the latest info about up-and-coming events, workshops, guest speakers, and new recipes, plus news about the School Plates Awards, information shared by our catering partners, and updates from ProVeg.



SCHOOL PLATES NETWORK MEETING
A regular online networking meeting, featuring presentations from caterers and local authorities sharing their experiences. Participants share their Awards journeys, explore the impact of their menu changes, and discuss what has worked well and the challenges they have overcome in making their menus more planet-friendly. It's a great opportunity to learn more about School Plates, to ask questions, share ideas, and get peer support. We'd love to see you there. You can sit quietly and soak up the information or get more involved – it's up to you!



PLANT-BASED RECIPES FOR SCHOOLS
Tried-and-tested, delicious, low-carbon dishes that children and caterers love. All our recipes are nutritious, based on whole plant foods, taste great, have low carbon ratings, and meet food and nutritional standards across England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales.



PLANT-BASED COOKING IN SCHOOLS WORKSHOP - IN-PERSON OR ONLINE
In this workshop, we show how to prepare delicious plant-based recipes designed specifically for schools.



Our online sessions are aimed at caterers and anyone else interested, including individual schools. It's a great way to continue to develop your knowledge and skills. You can also access previous online workshops, covering a range of topics and featuring expert speakers. Topics covered by previous workshops include ultra-processed foods, using tofu, beans, and lentils, developing children's taste, and the carbon footprint of food.



SCHOOL PLATES WEBINAR
We offer customised webinars for caterers and climate and sustainability organisations, as well as public health and other government departments to share how we can work together to make school food healthier and more climate-friendly. We are also happy to join your events, including climate and health summits, to talk about food choices and impact or facilitate workshops.



SCHOOL PLATES AWARDS
The ProVeg School Plates Awards recognises the positive steps that school caterers are taking to make school food healthier and more sustainable for children and our planet.

To enter the Awards, simply send your school menu to schoolplatesawards@proveg.org – your menu might receive national recognition! Once we receive your menu, we'll assess it against our Awards scoring criteria and make some simple suggestions to help you achieve your first award. We support you at every stage along the way and offer menu consultation, advice, and guidance, as well as helping you to plan your Awards journey – starting with some subtle and simple evidence-based actions that are right for your school community and at a pace that supports positive change.



IMPACT ANALYSIS
We offer impact assessments. By measuring your progression through each Award stage, we can analyse and share the impact of your menu changes.



CANTEEN TO CLASSROOM
Canteen to Classroom is a brand-new education programme that teaches children about the food they eat: where it comes from, how it is made, the health and nutritional benefits, and its environmental impact. The programme includes full lesson plans, lesson presentations, and a suite of resources – all aligned with the national curriculum – that are informative, engaging, and fun!





AWARDS OVERVIEW: CELEBRATING YOUR PLANT-FORWARD JOURNEY

As a way of acknowledging and celebrating the efforts that school caterers are making towards improving the health and sustainability of their menus, we have established The ProVeg School Plates Awards. This is an evidenced-based,⁵³ tiered system that presents school caterers across the UK with Bronze, Silver, and Gold Awards in recognition of their commitment to healthy and sustainable school menus.



START
HERE



Rebalancing menus + Adding subtle nudges + Promoting plants and plant-based options

- Introduce a plant-rich day (meat-free and fish-free day).
- Rebalancing menus – balancing and positioning of dishes.
- Descriptive and positive language.
- Blending plants into dishes (building familiarity).
- Rainbow-plants checklist (to set you on your path of more plants for all).
- Access to our plant-based, sustainable recipes.
- Support – join our online workshops and network meetings.

Training + Making the planetary connection + Adding more plant-based options

- Celebrate planet-friendly day on menus to help children connect their food choices with the future of our planet.
- Chef training and taste-testing – we're investing in you.
- Positioning of dishes and promoting real choice.
- Include a School Plates low-carbon, whole-food plant-based dish on menus.
- Blending plant protein into dishes (boosting fibre with beans, lentils, and plant protein).
- Rainbow-plants checklist (ideas to increase the diversity of plants on your menu).



Engaging the community + Promoting education + Building a more plant-rich menu

- Increase planet-friendly days to twice a week.
- Plan a taste-testing session for the school community.
- Listening to pupil/student and community voices.
- Plant-based options available in all categories.
- Education – promoting planetary and health benefits and engaging with the 'Canteen to Classroom' education programme.
- Increase the number of School Plates low-carbon, whole-food plant-based dishes on menus.
- Blending plant protein into dishes (boosting fibre with more beans, lentils, and plant protein).
- Rainbow plants checklist (adding more plants to menus to increase diversity and quantity of veg).
- Making the healthy and sustainable option, the easiest choice.

Over the next few pages, we'll walk you through the Awards stages and introduce you to some of the key actions for each stage.

For more detailed actions and the steps to working towards an Award, please send us your current menu for full step-by-step support. Our email address is schoolplatesawards@proveg.org

For the full checklist of actions, please download our Awards brochure from proveg.org/uk/proveg-schools.

BRONZE AWARD



Rebalancing menus + Adding subtle nudges + Promoting plants and plant-based options

FEATURED ACTIONS

- 1 Positive language
- 2 Plant-rich day

POSITIVE LANGUAGE

PROMOTE PLANTS

While meat-based dishes are often described beautifully, with names that accentuate flavour, texture, provenance, and key ingredients, plant-based dishes seldom receive the same level of care.

For example, we might see 'Sri Lankan Creamy Chicken Masala' up against a vegetarian version of the same dish, simply called 'Vegetable Curry'. Or 'A Homemade Italian-style Spaghetti Bolognese' up against a 'Meat-Free Bolognese'. When you compare dishes in this way, it's easy to see how the power of language affects the choices we make.

Instead, give the plant-based option the same care and attention as the meat-based dish. Make it sound as indulgent, delicious, exciting, and attractive as possible. This will help to counter the idea that plant-based food is bland and boring.

USE THE (V)

Research shows that terms such as 'vegetarian', 'vegan', and 'meat-free' can be off-putting and limit uptake to those who identify as vegetarian or vegan.⁵⁴ To identify the type of dish, simply add a small (v) or (ve) at the end of the meal name. This is food for everyone!

ADD DESCRIPTIVE WORDS

Ideas to try:

Flavour: sweet and sour, mild, smoky, zesty, BBQ

Texture: sticky, crispy, chunky, creamy, baked, roasted

Provenance: Italian, Mexican-style, Greek-style, Indian-style, Cornish, Scottish, Welsh, Irish, traditional, homemade

Child-friendliness: rainbow, cowboy, monster, brilliant, plant power, super, sunshine

GETTING STARTED

We understand the challenges that come with making changes to school menus. It takes input from lots of different people and requires a carefully considered approach. Our goal is to introduce positive change in a way that is practical and beneficial for everyone involved.

We recommend implementing changes gradually, using our carefully designed, evidenced-based actions through a step-by-step approach at each Awards stage. These subtle 'nudges' serve as simple yet impactful ways to assess and introduce new changes, building confidence and paving the way for future progress.

PLANT-RICH DAY

The best and easiest way to help children to eat more 'plant-based' foods, reduce climate emissions, and save money is by introducing more plant-rich or meat-free days.

The current School Food Standards recommends that schools and caterers encourage all children to have a meat-free day each week, and allows for up-to two days a week, using meat alternatives such as pulses, soya mince, tofu, and Quorn.⁵⁵

INTRODUCE A PLANT-RICH DAY (MEAT-FREE AND FISH-FREE) ONCE A WEEK.

This can be a subtle way to make a positive shift and assess the initial impact of your changes. Featuring plant-based versions of familiar meat-based meals has also proved to be popular.

MEAT-FREE MONDAY?

Some schools have Meat-Free Monday or similarly named days as part of their menu structure. However, naming a day in this way means that it might not be as well received as it could be. Check out our Silver Award featured actions (on page 22) for how to engage and empower children with positive language. And take a look at our case studies on page pages 32-33, which highlight the popularity of renamed meat-free days.

What does 'Plant-based' and 'Plant-rich' mean?

'Plant-based' means foods that are derived from plant sources, including fruits, vegetables, grains, pulses, legumes, nuts, and seeds. It excludes animal-based foods such as meat, fish, and eggs, and dairy products such as milk and cheese. 'Plant-rich' means the dish is mostly based on plants but can include small amounts of eggs and dairy.

RENAMING A DISH FROM

'MEAT-FREE SAUSAGE AND MASH' TO 'CUMBERLAND SPICED VEGGIE SAUSAGE AND MASH' INCREASED UPTAKE IN SAINSBURY'S CAFES BY 76%.⁵⁶



SILVER AWARD



Chef training + Making the planetary connection
+ Adding more plant-based options

FEATURED ACTIONS

- 1 Planet-friendly day
- 2 Positioning
- 3 Chef training and support

MEAT FREE MONDAY PLANET-FRIENDLY DAY



THE POWER OF POSITIVE LANGUAGE

In our many years of experience with school menus – and based on the latest research – we recommend that you avoid the term ‘meat-free’, since this implies that something is missing from a dish. Think of ‘fat-free’ and ‘sugar-free’ – it sounds like it won’t taste as good as the original! We’re moving on from ‘Meat-Free Mondays’ towards positive branded/themed days that are centred around the planet, the environment, or the deliciousness of plant-based foods.

WHAT WILL YOU CALL YOUR PLANET-FRIENDLY DAY?

Feel free to choose a name that works for your school community, but here are a few suggestions:

Planet-friendly Day

Climate-friendly Day

Tasty Plant Day

Plant Power Day

WHAT IS A PLANET-FRIENDLY DAY?

This is an opportunity to raise awareness about climate issues and help children to make the connection between the food they eat, their health, and the future of the planet.

Your themed day should be fun, relevant to your community, and thought-provoking. It should also highlight the role that the whole school community can play in eating more plants for our planet.

WHAT SHOULD YOU SERVE?

A planet-friendly day is an opportunity to serve the most sustainable foods. This means choosing to add only plant-rich dishes that are meat-free and fish-free. Ideally, these will include beans and lentils (such as hummus, bean burritos, blended beans in sauces, or lentils in place of minced meat), and be mostly unprocessed. Our recipes are low-carbon-rated and plant-based to give you some delicious and planet-friendly ideas. For a full list of our top recipes, please see page 28. To give you a taste of things, popular options include the following:

- ✓ Sausage and Red Pepper Pizza (ve)
- ✓ Oven-Baked Lasagne (ve)
- ✓ Planet-Friendly Spaghetti Bolognese (ve)



REBALANCING MENUS - POSITIONING

Research shows that top-row menu items are chosen more often.⁵⁷ In school menus, meat-based meals are usually listed first, followed by the vegetarian option. We know from research that people typically choose the default option on menus. So, why not make the plant-based option the default? Children still have the power of choice but let’s make the sustainable option the easiest. Here are some simple steps to get started:

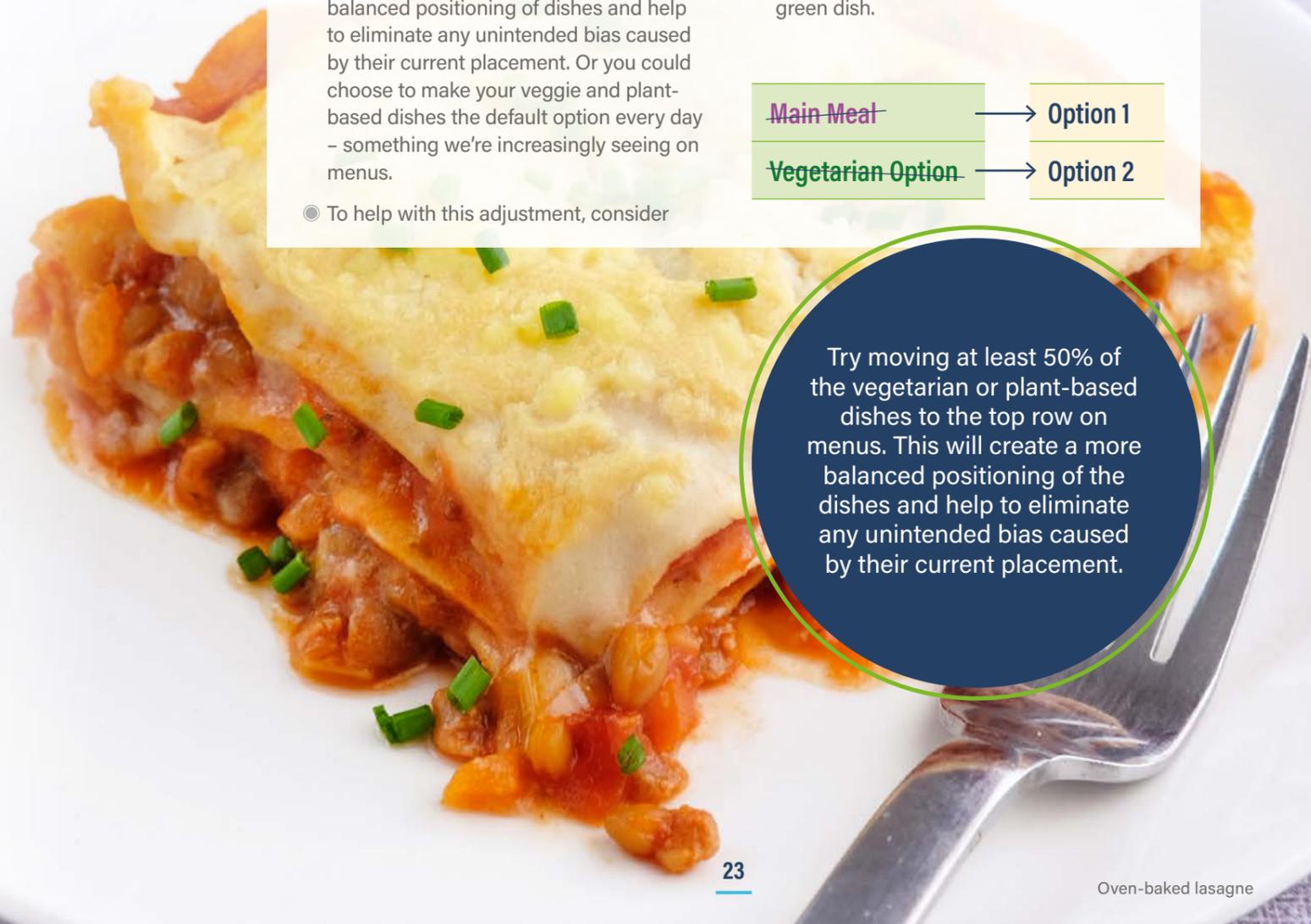
- It’s time to make some subtle but positive changes. Try moving at least 50% of the vegetarian or plant-based dishes to the top row on menus. This will create a more balanced positioning of dishes and help to eliminate any unintended bias caused by their current placement. Or you could choose to make your veggie and plant-based dishes the default option every day – something we’re increasingly seeing on menus.
- To help with this adjustment, consider

renaming your meal categories as ‘Option 1’ and ‘Option 2’ instead of ‘Main Meal’ and ‘Vegetarian.’ Calling the meat-based dish the ‘Main Meal’ suggests that it is the standard or superior choice, while implying that the vegetarian option is niche or inferior. These positive changes to menu positioning aim to promote more sustainable meal options as mainstream choices.

- Also, try to avoid separating the meat-based and vegetarian dishes by colour, as this reinforces habits, with children always choosing the red dish or avoiding the green dish.



Try moving at least 50% of the vegetarian or plant-based dishes to the top row on menus. This will create a more balanced positioning of the dishes and help to eliminate any unintended bias caused by their current placement.



CHEF TRAINING: INVESTING IN CHEFS AND UPGRADING SKILLS



GAIN CONFIDENCE IN PLANT-BASED COOKING

IN-PERSON CHEF TRAINING: In these training sessions, our experienced and enthusiastic plant-based chef trainers work together with local school caterers, development chefs, and other kitchen staff – and sometimes also local suppliers. Our aim is to educate and inspire everyone to approach plant-based food with a new perspective, build confidence with new ingredients and recipes, and have lots of fun while we're at it!

In these one-day hands-on sessions, one of our professional plant-based chef trainers, together with one of our School Plates team members, will help you and your catering team to:

- ✓ Gain confidence in plant-based cooking skills and techniques, including essential kitchen skills.
- ✓ Discover more about the benefits of plant-based nutrition for children, as well as the positive impact on our planet.
- ✓ Learn about the importance of encouraging children to try a wider variety of plant-based ingredients.
- ✓ Use familiar favourites as the basis for creating delicious, plant-based versions.
- ✓ Enjoy taste-testing the recipes made during training – and have a lot of fun.

CO₂

The UK **Climate Change Committee** recommends that local authorities provide a daily plant-based menu option and offer training in plant-based cooking and skills for caterers.



WE'RE HERE TO SUPPORT YOU

Join us for our online Plant-based Cooking in Schools Workshops and training sessions. These sessions are aimed at caterers, individual schools, those running climate projects in schools, and anyone else who is interested in plant-based cooking or eating. We demonstrate how to prepare simple, affordable, nutritionally balanced – and most importantly – **tasty plant-based recipes that we know children love!**

WORKSHOPS: live online one-hour workshops focusing on seasonal menu changes and featuring recipe demos, an expert guest speaker, and Q&As. You can watch previous workshops on our YouTube channel.

ONLINE TRAINING: new short-format training videos covering key School Plates topics will be available from 2025.

Online topics:

- ✓ Introduction to the School Plates programme.
- ✓ Why it's important to offer healthy and planet-friendly meals.
- ✓ How to use plant-based ingredients, including cooking methods and recipe demos.
- ✓ School Plates Awards introduction plus information about evidence-based actions.

Customised options:

- ✓ We can help develop a customised training plan for you – get in touch to see how we can work together.



EXAMPLE SCHOOL MENU

SHOWCASING BRONZE + SILVER EDITS

GETTING TO GOLD

(v) and (ve) – or other symbols – are used as identifiers after the name of all vegetarian and plant-based dishes (including sides and desserts).



BRONZE EDIT

Rebalancing menus

Renaming your meal categories as 'Option 1' and 'Option 2' helps to normalise plant-based and vegetarian meals, and enables you to position these dishes on the top row on some days. This encourages more children to choose them.

SILVER EDIT



Positive language and planetary connection

Plant-rich days (meat-free and fish-free) are described as 'Planet-Friendly', 'Climate-Friendly', 'Tasty Plant Day' or similar positive wording. Instead of 'Meat-Free Mondays', you can theme your plant-based day around the planet, plants, or the environment.



BRONZE EDIT



Introducing plant-based ingredients

Introducing more plants into dishes by blending vegetables into sauces is a great way to increase variety. Building familiarity with new plants in familiar dishes is a positive step in helping children to eat more plants. For example, blending carrots or butternut squash into a creamy tomato sauce. Silver and Gold edits include blending beans and lentils into familiar dishes.



SILVER EDIT

Rebalancing menus

Plant-based or vegetarian options positioned at the top of the menu for at least 50% of days – create a more even balance between dishes.

	MEAT-FREE MONDAY	PLANET-FRIENDLY TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
MAIN MEAL OPTION 1	Chicken Pie	Veggie Tacos Shredded Tofu Tacos with Refried Beans (ve)	Veggie Sausages & Mash Toad-in-the-Hole (ve)	Cottage Pie	Meat-Free Sausage Roll Indian-Style Sausage Roll (ve)
VEGETARIAN OPTION OPTION 2	Vegetable Curry Katsu Curry with Sweet Potato (ve)	Spaghetti Bolognese Planet-Friendly Spaghetti Bolognese (ve)	Pork Sausages & Mash	Vegetarian Pasta Pasta Shells with Creamy Roasted Tomato Sauce (ve)	Fish & Chips



SILVER EDIT

Planetary connection

Meal names that reflect the new planet-themed day help children to make the connection between the food they eat and the effects on the planet. This is an opportunity to feature your most sustainable plant-based recipes.



SILVER EDIT

Promoting real choice

By adding one or two extra ingredients, you can give a dish a whole new identity. In this instance, adding a Yorkshire pudding to the veggie sausages could tempt a lot more children to choose the plant-based option.



SILVER EDIT

Promoting real choice

Offering substantially different options on the same day helps to promote real choice for all. This also increases the uptake of plant-based meals.



BRONZE EDIT

Descriptive and positive language

Renaming this meal with descriptive language makes it more appealing to all children.

GOLD AWARD



Engaging the community + Promoting education
+ Building a more plant-rich menu

FEATURED ACTIONS

- 1 Plant-rich menus: Plant-based and low-carbon options
+ Blending plants and plant proteins
- 2 Taste-testing

PLANT-RICH MENUS

Getting more vegetables into dishes and onto menus, while improving the quality and quantity of existing plant-based options, is what we're aiming for at Gold Award level. This is your opportunity to showcase your most sustainable menus and lead the way in showing what's possible.

This can be achieved by adding more plant-based dishes to menus as well as blending vegetables and plant proteins into existing meat-based dishes, thus making more sustainable and healthier options accessible to everyone.

PLANT-BASED AND LOW-CARBON OPTIONS

Include three or more whole food, plant-based, low-carbon dishes on menus each week.

These dishes should be based on popular recipes in order to increase appeal, as they are already familiar to most children. They should be based on minimally processed or unprocessed whole foods such as vegetables and plant proteins (e.g. tofu, lentils, or beans).

For inspiration, see our School Plates recipes – all of which are low-carbon and compliant with school food and nutrition standards! Alternatively, you can send us your plant-based, whole-food recipes and we'll help to assess their carbon rating and support lowering it with simple swaps, if needed.

OUR MOST POPULAR RECIPES

MAINS

- Shredded Tofu Tacos with Refried Beans (ve)
- Planet-Friendly Spaghetti Bolognese (ve)
- Creamy Cauli Mac 'n' Cheese 'n' Peas (ve)
- Spicy Singapore Noodles (ve)
- Sri Lankan Sweet Potato & Coconut Curry (ve)
- Smoky Sausage & Mushroom Goulash (ve)
- Chunky Veggie-Power Biryani (ve)
- Crushed Chickpea & Sweetcorn Mayo Wrap (ve)

DESSERTS

- Peach Melba Crunch (ve)
- Chocolatey Orange Pots (ve)
- Sticky Chocolate Brownie with Banana
- Nice Cream (ve)

BLENDING PLANTS AND PLANT PROTEINS

Blending plant-based ingredients into existing dishes offers a promising way to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions associated with meat dishes.⁶⁰ This approach promotes consuming more plant-based foods in familiar meat-based dishes, thus enhancing their nutritional value by increasing fibre and plant diversity, as well as providing cost-saving benefits. While the taste remains centred on meat, incorporating plant-based ingredients brings added nutritional and environmental advantages.

Popular steps to achieve a blended approach:

BRONZE



Blend any type of plant into a creamy or tomato-based sauce. This encourages children to eat more vegetables by incorporating them into familiar sauces that are used as a base for many meals.

SILVER



Blend plant proteins into popular minced meat-based dishes for varied menu options. For example, you could substitute at least 25% of the meat with brown lentils. See the suggestions*.

GOLD

Increase blending ratios in order to boost the plant content of a meat-based dish. We suggest at least a 50:50 ratio of plant-based to meat ingredients. This can also include dishes made with meat cuts, for example, in a pie or in burgers. Another option is to switch to 100% plant-based alternatives.



Blended sauces can be used in lasagne, bolognese, burritos, chilli con carne, and cottage and shepherd's pies, as well as in other meat-based dishes and pies. See the suggestions below*.

*Choose from different plant proteins:

- ✓ **MINCED-MEAT OR MEAT PIE DISHES:** add green or brown lentils, black beans, soya or Quorn mince, or grated tofu.
- ✓ **TOMATO SAUCE, SOUPS, AND STEWS:** add red lentils or tofu, or blend in butter beans.
- ✓ **CREAMY SAUCE:** blend in butter beans or tofu.

INCREASING PLANT-BASED INGREDIENTS IN DISHES AND ACROSS MENUS - GOLD ACTIONS:



Increasing weekly plant-rich days x 2
(meat-free and fish-free)



Rainbow plants checklist



Whole-food, plant-based dishes on menus



Blending
(pulses and plant proteins)

TASTE-TESTING EVENT

We invite school caterers to host taste-testing events at their schools, with children, parents, and school staff coming together to sample a variety of delicious plant-based and blended dishes. These enjoyable events are a great way to promote the uptake of healthier and more sustainable meals, while also encouraging children (and parents!) to become more familiar with a diverse range of vegetables. According to research by the World Resources Institute, taste plays a crucial role in influencing food choices, since promoting environmental and health benefits is, on its own, not enough to influence food choices.

Hosting taste-testing events at your schools can help your community to explore and enjoy new dishes while promoting the personal and planetary benefits of healthy food choices.

We can help you to plan your event and help to ensure that it's successful by offering ideas, sharing popular recipes and plant-rich swaps, and providing educational resources.



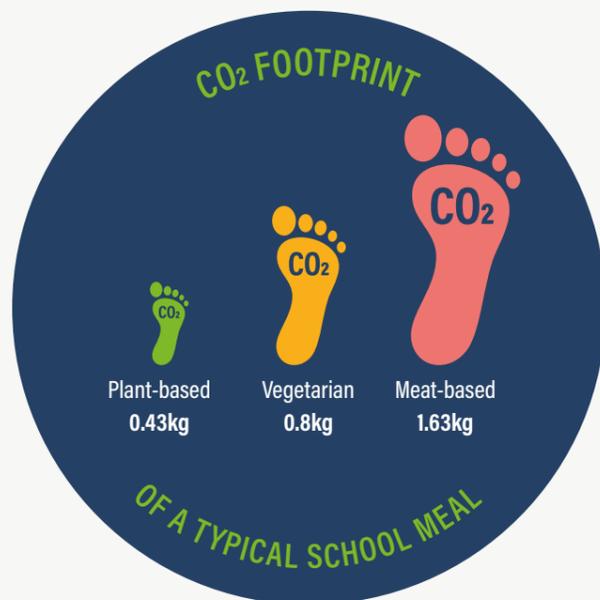
MEASURING THE IMPACT OF YOUR CHANGES:

YOUR CLIMATE, HEALTH, AND BUDGET WINS

By introducing powerful, plant-forward actions such as **planet-friendly days**, **blending plant proteins** into popular meat dishes, and **increasing vegetables and legumes** in dishes, school caterers can lead the way in fostering sustainable eating that benefits communities and the environment.

The data supporting these benefits is compelling, highlighting the transformative potential of **embracing sustainable and healthy options** on school menus.

We're here to help you demonstrate the **positive impact of the changes you're making**. By providing us with some basic data and collaborating with our programme analyst, we can generate a report showcasing personalised impact data. This report can be shared with your stakeholders to advocate for the changes and celebrate success together!



² Based on the meal comparison on page 13 (Meat-Based vs Plant-Based)

³ Figures based on Q2, 2024

⁴ Figures based on 2023 annual review

BLENDED TECHNIQUE

Meat-reduction, steak pie

100 100% Beef

£1.12 per portion
1.9g fibre
17g protein
2.76kg CO₂

75 75/25 Beef/Lentils

94p per portion
2.6g fibre
14g protein
2.13kg CO₂

50 50/50 Beef/Lentils

75p per portion
3.3g fibre
11g protein
1.5kg CO₂

	CLIMATE	HEALTH	BUDGET
<p>PLANT-BASED MEAL SWAP²</p>	<p>✓ 66% less CO₂</p>	<p>✓ 30% more fibre ✓ 14% more protein ✓ 87% lower in saturated fat</p>	<p>✓ 43% cheaper</p>
<p>SCHOOL CATERING PARTNER³ (working with us through our Awards actions)</p>	<p>CO₂ emissions reduced through menu changes</p>	<p>✓ Increase in fibre ✓ More plants on menus ✓ More plant-based meal options for all ✓ Reduction in red and processed meat</p> <p>Example: A local authority caterer serving over 7000 meals a day experienced a 13% reduction in meat and a 16% increase in plant-based meals on menus.</p>	<p>Example: A multi-academy trust reduced costs by 20% after increasing plant-based and vegetarian meal options on their menu as part of their Silver Award actions.</p> <div style="text-align: center; background-color: #00BCD4; color: white; border-radius: 50%; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> £ ↓20% </div>
<p>SCHOOL PLATES PROGRAMME⁴</p>	<p>✓ By working with school caterers, we have saved an estimated 15,000 tonnes of CO₂ (the equivalent of running 3,400 cars for one year)!</p>	<p>✓ Over 37 million meals swapped to more planet-friendly options (meat-free or plant-based).</p>	

LOCAL AUTHORITIES:
In a local authority responsible for catering for around 200 schools, we found that our interventions resulted in a 9% shift from meat-based to meat-free or plant-based meals served.

MULTI ACADEMY TRUST (MAT):
In a MAT with a smaller number of schools, we saw a larger shift of around 29% towards meat-free and plant-based.

CASE STUDIES

Find out how our partners are creating a positive shift to healthier and more sustainable school food in their communities and learn about the impact of the changes they have made.

LOCAL AUTHORITY CATERER (LA)

CELEBRATING GOLD WITH WALTHAM FOREST CATERING

Waltham Forest Catering is a local authority catering team that wanted to make their menus more planet-friendly, and, in line with the local council's Climate Action Plan, to reduce emissions and encourage behaviour change. In order to support these aims, they started engaging with us in spring 2021. They attended an in-person Plant-Based Cooking in Schools Workshop, where they learned about the School Plates recipes. Gradually, the team introduced some of these recipes, eventually feeling confident enough to apply for an Award. In spring 2023, they were thrilled to receive a Gold Award, achieving the maximum possible points.

The first review of their menu scored very highly, with a 'Save the Planet Day' in place, a voting system for children to choose their favourite new dish, healthy cartoon characters, and posters featuring 'Forest Eco Ranger' that encourage children to choose the plant-based option, along with lots of planet-friendly dishes on the menu. In order to qualify for the Gold Award, they improved labelling further, provided evidence of tastings, and increased the provision of daily plant-based dishes across all sections of their menu, including desserts. They also involved the schools' Eco-Councils in order to discuss the new dishes and understand their impact.

The Waltham Forest Catering menu is a shining example of what can happen when a team is focused on delivering the best outcome. Not content with being the only council in the country with a Gold Award, they have since pushed even further and are currently in the process of making their planet-friendly days free of the 14 most common allergens.

IN-PERSON PLANT-BASED COOKING IN SCHOOLS TRAINING & TASTE-TESTING

"We were all extremely excited to make dishes from your new recipe book – we felt very privileged. The team definitely acquired very practical tips regarding tofu, and found the workshop extremely beneficial. All the dishes that we made were really delicious and it was lovely to have lunch as a whole team. I would like to thank everyone at ProVeg for their time and expertise. Waltham Forest looks forward to working with ProVeg on future projects."

Andrea Moore
Development Chef, London Borough of Waltham Forest



AWARDS ACTION HIGHLIGHT: PLANET-FRIENDLY DAY

LOCAL AUTHORITY CATERER - SOUTH TYNESIDE CATERING SERVICES

"ProVeg delivered a Plant-Based Cooking in Schools Workshop at our training day back in September 2022, which was really well received by our cooks. Exciting and colourful dishes were demonstrated and the cooks were amazed at how good the plant-based options tasted, some of which were recreated in kitchens across the borough.

We currently have some of the School Plates recipes on our new menu, which are very popular. Our menu, which we started last September, was awarded a Silver School Plates Award, which we are delighted about!

After working with ProVeg, they suggested changing the names of options such as 'Veggie Burger' to 'Garden Burger' (ve) and 'Meat-free Monday' to 'Planet Friendly Day'. I have to say, normally we do have some resistance to meat-free days, however not this year! I think it's all about mindset: if people think you are taking options away, or forcing them to make certain choices, they object. But a simple play on words has helped us massively. The food choices are still meat-free but they have become Planet-Friendly instead, something much more positive!"

Bridget McCulla
Catering Service Manager, South Tyneside



MULTI-ACADEMY TRUST (MAT)

SHINING A LIGHT ON SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL MENUS THOMAS DEACON EDUCATION TRUST WINS SILVER



Thomas Deacon Education Trust (TDET) looks after 5,000 children in the Peterborough and Cambridgeshire area, with an in-house catering service across seven schools, including primary and secondary. Following an in-person Plant-Based Cooking in Schools Workshop session, TDET entered the Awards, receiving a Silver Award for Warboys, Thomas Deacon Junior Academy, Wellbourne, and Upwood schools.

One of the challenges faced by TDET was creating multiple sets of award-winning menus, with different dishes on each one. Making the required menu tweaks on a menu that varied from one school to the next is a considerably more complex process, compared to using one generic menu. And they are already planning a move towards Gold!

Q Have you saved on procurement costs since you started working with ProVeg? Can you estimate what % of savings?

A With the changes which we made whilst working with ProVeg, I estimate that we have around 20% cost reductions.

Q How would you rate the service ProVeg provides out of 10? What aspects do you like?

A 10 out of 10. Always a pleasure to work with ProVeg with new ideas for menus, and the support given. The workshops, either online or face-to-face, are a great way for others to learn new ideas and how easy it is to make changes to menus to include plant-based foods.

Q Any other data or insights on whether the uptake of meals has been increased or improved?

A Our overall uptake of school meals has increased by about 20% across all of the primary schools.

Changes introduced on TDET's Awards journey:

- ✓ Changed the language on the menu
- ✓ Changed the positioning of dishes
- ✓ Added more plant-based recipes
- ✓ Reduced the meat content in some recipes
- ✓ Introduced taste-testing sessions
- ✓ Added or increased meat-free days
- ✓ Introduced a second plant-based day



CONTRACT CATERER

SODEXO FEATURES PLANT-RICH DISHES ON PRIMARY SCHOOL MENUS

Sodexo, a private catering company, serves more than 80 schools. The changes they're implementing include increasing the quantity of plant-based dishes and improving their descriptions on menus.

"It is imperative that children across the country can access tasty, healthy and nutritious food whilst also understanding its impact on the climate, so they are empowered to make informed decisions about what they eat.

At Sodexo, we are committed to providing quality meals whilst reducing carbon emissions and food waste across our entire school portfolio."

Rebecca Bridgement
Managing Director, Sodexo State Schools

Sodexo's primary-school menu already featured some excellent dish names, with a weekly 'Planet Earth Day' and a high number of plant-based main-meal options. Now, all vegetarian (v) and vegan (ve) options are fully labelled throughout the menu, tastings of new dishes have been recorded and shared with ProVeg, and further Plant-Based Cooking in Schools training sessions are on the horizon.



DON'T TAKE OUR WORD FOR IT!

FEEDBACK FROM OUR CATERING PARTNERS

FIFE COUNCIL

"Even things as simple as shuffling the meals around so that the meat-based and plant-based meals are mixed up and not having meat-based meals appear at the top of our menu, have helped to encourage our pupils to take the plant-based choice a little more often than they would have usually."

Menu Development Team
H4S, Fife Council

LONDON BOROUGH OF BARKING & DAGENHAM

"ProVeg are doing a great job of trying to encourage and educate school caterers on the health benefits and the sustainability of what they are producing for pupils. I have found them really helpful and always available when needing assistance. Their practical training day with our school cooks was a great day, with some fantastic plant-based recipes."

Daniel Williams
Executive Chef, BD Together

LONDON BOROUGH OF HAVERING

"The input from ProVeg, by providing us with simple adjustments such as rephrasing menu descriptors, has enabled us to improve customer engagement. The support and engagement from ProVeg has been well received by all in the service and we look forward to continuing our work with them."

Charlotte Newman
School Catering Nutritionist, HES Catering

LONDON BOROUGH OF WALTHAM FOREST

"Working with ProVeg has enabled our Schools Catering team to access practical expertise to make their ambitions around nutritious, cost-effective, climate-friendly school food a reality. The feedback we've received on our menus shows children and adults alike are learning how delicious plant-based dishes can be. These menus also address the eco-anxiety that is increasing amongst our children, empowering them to make small daily choices that help the planet. The ProVeg School Plates programme helps school caterers demonstrate a practical commitment to more climate-friendly service delivery and every school should be asking 'How does our provider measure up?'"

Natalie Kruger
Head of Operations - Services to Schools, London Borough of Waltham Forest

MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL

"It was great to see the number of caterers who changed their views about plant-based meals at our recent workshop. I also had a chance to try the meals, which were delicious, and we will be looking to run another workshop in future to cover more school caterers."

Rob Potter
Project Manager, Manchester City Council

MEONCROSS SCHOOL, HAMPSHIRE

"The School Plates programme has made me think much harder about how to make more plant-based foods accessible to all pupils, whilst planning menus. It has helped with reducing costs by using more pulses in our (main) meals."

Deborah Davis
Catering Manager at Meoncross School - a private school with an in-house catering department

FEEDBACK FROM CLIMATE OFFICERS

NEWCASTLE CITY COUNCIL

"We have recently been awarded a Bronze School Plates Award for our primary school menus, after working with ProVeg for over a year. They have been extremely supportive and provided very constructive feedback on how to make our menus more sustainable. We very much appreciate the additional information that ProVeg has provided to us, including the recipe books and the engagement in our Youth Climate Summit this year. Thanks again for all the support you have provided to us and we look forward to working with you more in the future."

Rachel Somerville
Climate Policy and Delivery Officer, Newcastle City Council

FEEDBACK FROM PARENTS

"It is good to see [my child's school] driving the message about eating less meat to help all in the future."

"It's great to see meals made from whole plant foods available at my child's school. These are a much better alternative to deep-fried and processed meat dishes with a few stray vegetables on the side. That was all you could really eat when I was at school!"

"My two children normally have a packed lunch but on meat-free days they always want to have a school dinner."

"My children normally will not eat vegetables, but on meat-free days my son comes home saying that the lunch today was yummy and that he tried and liked the vegetables."

"I wish more schools would introduce this as one of my children enjoys this through TDET and my other child does not have this from his school."

"It's good to see less meat on menus and varied meat-free options. Well done. Keep it up."

FEEDBACK FROM SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS

"Working with ProVeg UK has really helped to shape the direction we wanted to take our school menu to reduce meat consumption. Meetings have been effective to allow friendly discussions to take place and provide useful feedback on our menu changes. Advice has also been invaluable, as experience has been offered to us to help us make changes smoothly, avoiding potential pitfalls."

Julie Shortman
Deputy Head Teacher, Thanet Primary School, Hull

"ProVeg and the School Plates programme is clearly doing great work. The children must be aware of the facts around food choices and the impact of their school meals. We are keen to include Canteen to Classroom in our curriculum. Not only does it focus on important topics, it is also really engaging for the staff and our children!"

Head Teacher
Primary School, Essex

FEEDBACK FROM CHILDREN

"The taste is spectacular!"

"Eating more plants can help your health, is good for the planet, and for animals. Definitely, better for the animals. So it's a win-win-win really!"

"I wish we could do this [Canteen to Classroom session] all of the time. We might be on this planet for another 100 years, so it's important we know how best to look after it."

FEEDBACK ON CANTEEN TO CLASSROOM

"What an amazing idea. This is exactly what children need to be learning about - plus, they want to know more about climate change! It is their future after all!"

CANTEEN TO CLASSROOM

Educating and empowering children

With our support, thousands of schools are embracing healthy and sustainable meals – now it's time for children to learn more about the food they're eating! We want to empower children to make informed choices but the information and knowledge is currently out of reach for so many of them. Educating children about the impact of their food choices is essential in nurturing future generations that are both health and environmentally conscious.

With this in mind, we have developed a brand-new educational programme – Canteen to Classroom – in order to teach children about the food they eat: where it comes from, how it is made, and its impact on our health and the planet. The programme is delivered through fun and engaging, fully planned 'done-for-you' lessons that align with the national curriculum and offer fantastic cross-curricular opportunities.

Children care about the climate and their future

Children care about climate change more than any other generation. According to a UNICEF report, nine out of 10 children are worried about climate change, with 89% of children saying they don't feel enough is being done to tackle the climate crisis and 81% feeling that they are not being listened to. We must act on these findings. Our programme focuses on helping children to understand the impact of their food choices on their health and the environment, as well as the fact that they can directly influence the choices that are available to them. There is also a growing movement to incorporate more climate-focused opportunities in schools. 'Education is a key tool in the fight against climate change.'⁵⁵

We do the hard work so you don't have to

Canteen to Classroom has been developed specifically for primary schools. There are 24 custom-designed lessons, six within each age-appropriate scheme of work:

- Early Years Foundation Stage
- Key Stage 1
- Lower Key Stage 2
- Upper Key Stage 2

Each scheme of work comes provided with high-quality evidence-based lesson plans, engaging lesson presentations, and additional resources – saving teachers and education providers precious time and effort.

School timetables are already tight, so we have created lessons that can fit in and around what schools already do. Lessons do not need to be taught sequentially and can be delivered as stand-alone sessions, as a half-term block, or as a way of supporting and enhancing themed weeks or special learning days.

The lessons are centred around our five reasons to be ProVeg: Taste, Health, Justice, Animals, and Environment. Each lesson includes national curriculum links, is aligned to the EU Sustainable Development Goals, and is easily adaptable to the needs of the children. While developing lessons that are educational, evidence-based, time-efficient and aligned to statutory frameworks, we prioritised and ensured a high level of creativity, freedom, adaptability, and fun!



THE KEY BENEFITS OF THE CANTEEN TO CLASSROOM PROGRAMME INCLUDE:

- Experiencing, celebrating, and having fun tasting fruit, vegetables, and other plant-based foods.
- Understanding the health benefits and importance of eating more plants and plant-based foods.
- Gaining a greater awareness of food waste and the ways that we can feed our increasing population nutritiously and sustainably.
- Increasing knowledge about where our food comes from and how it ends up on our plates.
- Assessing the impact of making sustainable food choices.
- Empowering children to make informed choices about food and the positive steps they can take in their own lives, as well as that of the community and the planet.
- Engaging the next generation in debates around big topics such as the future of our planet and climate change.
- Developing cross-curricular skills, including: data handling and analysis; debating; geography skills such as exploring land use; using search technologies effectively in computing; science through nutrition, plants, and animal classification; using art creatively; cooking and nutrition within design and technology; and even taking part in team games and being active during PE.

PLANNED LESSONS INCLUDE:



Getting hands-on and tasting a diverse range of richly-coloured, plant-based foods, encouraging children to 'eat a rainbow'



Promoting good health choices by being active and playing games that teach children about greenhouse gases and their effect on climate change.



Letting children explore different taste profiles and using this knowledge to create, test, and refine their very own dish for the school canteen.



Learning about well-known athletes and how we can be healthy, strong, and successful following a plant-based diet.



Critically discussing and analysing statistics and statements regarding the impact of agriculture on nature, the planet, and people.



Evaluating, researching, and debunking myths associated with the food system and what we put on our plates.



Using key scientific research to inform designs for future sustainable food labelling and behavioural-nudging visuals.



OTHER ORGANISATIONS WE LIKE

and you might too



Beans is How is a campaign to double global bean consumption by 2028. Beans, peas, lentils, and other pulses are a simple, affordable approach to mitigating the current challenges in global health, climate, and cost of living. Comprising a coalition of 100 partners in 50 countries (and growing), Beans is How is advocating for chefs and food-service providers to put more #beansonthemenu.

beansishow.org



Eco-Schools is the nation's largest environmental schools programme. For 30 years, the programme has given nurseries, schools, and colleges a seven-step framework that's been proven to increase environmental learning, make sites more sustainable, and empower pupils to become tomorrow's climate leaders.

eco-schools.org.uk



Let's Go Zero is a national campaign uniting teachers, pupils, parents and their schools, as they all work together to be zero carbon by 2030. Every school that signs up pledges to work towards a more sustainable future, while calling for much-needed government support to help all schools reach their zero-carbon goals. Alongside the campaign, Climate Action Advisors offer a network of free, independent experts who can support schools on their journey to become zero carbon – helping you go further, faster, with your climate action plans.

letszero.org



The Ministry of Eco Education provides support for teachers integrating sustainability education into their curriculum by bringing together the best free resources and opportunities, from hundreds of organisations, into an easy-to-use framework and approach. MEE is totally free and provides wider support including staff training and events.

ministryofeco.org



TastEd helps children develop healthy eating habits by introducing them to a variety of foods, focusing on vegetables and fruit. The programme combats the dominance of ultra-processed foods, encouraging children to enjoy fresh, whole foods. TastEd is an essential food education programme in the UK that helps improve children's diets and overall health.

tasteeducation.com



The UK Schools Sustainability Network Operations group is a specialist branch of the UK Schools Sustainability Network, and part of the Global Action Plan (GAP). The purpose of the network is to bring together school operations, business, finance, and sustainability leaders with sector leaders in order to collaborate on strengthening sustainability, climate, and biodiversity action in schools.

ops.ukssn.org

School Plates has been featured in the following publications



REFERENCES



For references.



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