

DRAFT Sustainable Food Policy

Introduction

Exeter City Council recognises the importance of accessing a whole-food¹ plant-based² diet and the effect dietary choices can have on individual carbon footprints, health, and the local economy. Every choice we make as individuals and as a Council has an impact. Increasing awareness of dietary options can allow individuals to make informed choices.

This Sustainable Food Policy supports three of the Council's strategic priorities: net zero carbon city, prosperous local economy, and healthy and active city. It also aligns with the Devon Carbon Plan, under the Food, Land and Sea theme.

This policy has been developed as part of the work of the Plant-Based Food Task & Finish group, which was established following the passing of the Plant-Based Food motion in December 2022. The task and finish group was a member-led group with relevant internal officers and external professionals invited in to provide advice.

*"Transformation to healthy diets by 2050 will require substantial dietary shifts. Global consumption of fruits, vegetables, nuts and legumes will have to double, and consumption of foods such as red meat and sugar will have to be reduced by more than 50%. A diet rich in plant-based foods and with fewer animal source foods confers both improved health and environmental benefits", Professor Walter Willett MD, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.*³

Impact of dietary choices on individual carbon footprints

The global food system is responsible for up to 33% of all greenhouse gases (GHG), to put this into perspective, air travel is currently responsible for 3.5% of all GHG⁴. The GHG produced by the food system mainly include carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide, all of which contribute to climate change in different ways.⁴

When we compare the carbon footprint of different types of foods, meat and dairy products tend to emit more greenhouse gasses than plant-based foods⁵. This is the case when comparing greenhouse gases per kilogram, per kilocalorie, or per gram of protein⁵. Within meat, fish and animal products, there is also a consistent pattern: larger animals tend to have a higher carbon footprint⁵. Beef typically has the highest emissions, followed by lamb, cheese, pork, fish, chicken, and then eggs⁵.

The special report on climate change and land by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) describes plant-based diets as a major opportunity for mitigating and adapting to climate change, whilst also enabling substantial co-benefits in relation to health⁶. The special report also includes a policy recommendation to reduce meat consumption⁶.

¹ The term "whole" in whole-food plant-based diet describes foods that are minimally processed. This includes whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and legumes.

² The term "plant-based" refers to vegetables, grains, pulses, or other foods derived from plants.

³ Summary Report of the EAT-Lancet Commission, accessed on 03.03.2023: [EAT-Lancet Commission Summary Report.pdf \(eatforum.org\)](#)

⁴ National Food Strategy, accessed on 03.03.2023: [25585_1669_NFS_The_Plan_July21_S12_New-1.pdf](#)

⁵ Environmental Impacts of Food Production – Our World in Data, accessed on 03.03.2023: [Environmental Impacts of Food Production - Our World in Data](#)

⁶ Special Report – Climate Change and Land – Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, accessed on 03.03.2023: [Special Report on Climate Change and Land — IPCC site](#)

Impact of dietary choices on health

There are significant health benefits of eating more plant-based foods at every life stage, with the UK seeing poor diet as the number one cause of death and disability, resulting in a rising issue of obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and cancer.⁷

Diets that have an emphasis on plant-based foods, such as vegetarian, vegan, or Mediterranean-style diets, have been linked with reduced risk of heart disease, strokes and type 2 diabetes compared to less healthy dietary patterns⁸. Scientific research also shows indication that healthy plant-based diets can have beneficial effects on risk of disease, for example, lowering blood pressure, reducing blood cholesterol and promoting a healthy bodyweight⁸.

Impact of dietary choices on local economy

Although what we eat matters much more than how far it has travelled, as transport accounts for just 5% of food systems emissions globally⁹, there is a strong case for sourcing local food for the benefit of the local economy. There is a significant opportunity for Exeter City Council to support local suppliers in its sustainable food procurement process.

Sourcing food locally keeps money within the local area, helping to sustain local producers and create local jobs¹⁰. Sourcing food locally and supporting local farmers is vital for long-term food security, especially with the increase in frequency of extreme weather events threatening our national food security, and our current reliance on fossil fuels to produce, package, transport and source food¹⁰.

Plant-Based Food Motion

In December 2022, Exeter City Council passed a motion to ensure that by the Exeter City Council Annual Council in May 2023, food provided at catered internal Council meetings¹¹ will be plant-based and that it will showcase plant-based foods at catered events¹².

The motion also ensured that all Council run external sites including Leisure Centres, cafes and restaurants have plant-based options available as part of their regular catering offer and advertised clearly on their menu.

Policy

Wherever practical, purchasers will work with suppliers to progress environmental initiatives and exchange best practices. The policy considers the following key areas; the availability of plant-based options, locality and seasonality, meat, dairy products, eggs, fish, water provision, dietary requirements, accreditation, organic, Fairtrade and waste.

This policy does not cover:

- Licensing relating to the supply of food.
- Planning applications relating to food.
- Private hires at Council venues; this is covered by separate approved supplier list.

⁷ The evidence supporting a plant-based diet for optimal health and prevention of chronic disease – Plant-based health professionals UK, accessed on 03.03.2023: [HE-KEY-BENEFITS-OF-PLANT-BASED-NUTRITION.pdf \(plantbasedhealthprofessionals.com\)](#)

⁸ Plant-based diets - British Nutrition Foundation, accessed on 03.03.2023: [Plant-based diets - British Nutrition Foundation](#)

⁹ Environmental Impacts of Food Production - Our World in Data, accessed on 03.03.2023: [Environmental Impacts of Food Production - Our World in Data](#)

¹⁰ Why we should embrace eating locally – Better Food, accessed on 03.03.2023: [Why we should embrace eating locally - Better Food](#)

¹¹ An internal Council meeting is defined as a Council meeting run by an agenda, chaired and minuted.

¹² A catered event is defined as all other Council events.

- Council leased sites (e.g. RAMM café), for future lease agreements, we encourage applicants to work towards complying with the Sustainable Food Policy.
- Vending machines at Council sites.
- Drink; however, plant-based alternatives to milk will be provided at Council events and Council run sites.

The policy requirements are detailed in the table below.

This policy will be reviewed November 2023.

Sustainable Food Policy requirements

Standards required		Applicable to		
		Council Meetings	Council Events	Council run sites
Availability of plant-based food options	Plant-based food options only	✓		
	Plant-based alternatives to milk		✓	✓
	Plant-based food placed at top of menu (showcased)		✓	✓
	Plant-based food placed first in food counters (showcased)		✓	✓
	Food labelling consistency for vegan and vegetarian options		✓	✓
	Menus should aim for a split of 50% plant-based, 50% dairy, fish and meat options		✓	✓
	Where possible, avoid ultra-processed plant-based meat alternatives and ultra-processed meat based products	✓	✓	✓
Locality and seasonality	Food provision must aim to prioritise local suppliers	✓	✓	✓
	Evidence of use of in-season UK produce		✓	
	Where local suppliers are used, information should be on display to promote local suppliers (showcased)	✓	✓	✓
Meat, dairy products, eggs and fish	Ensure meat, dairy products and eggs are purchased from sources with good animal husbandry		✓	✓
	Where possible, do not buy fish species identified as most 'at risk' by the Marine Conservation Society or and only buy fish from sustainable sources such as those registered with the Marine Stewardship Council		✓	✓
Water	Free drinking water is prominently available. Catering outlets should sign up to Refill where possible	✓	✓	✓
Dietary requirements	Where possible, menus should aim to cater for all dietary and cultural requirements		✓	✓
	Food labelling consistency for allergies and intolerances	✓	✓	✓
Accreditation	All suppliers and contractors will be expected to hold an environmental accreditation (EMS) such as Green Accord or other equivalent and approved accreditation	✓	✓	✓
Organic	Where practical and cost-effective, select certified organic foods	✓	✓	✓

Standards required		Applicable to		
		Council Meetings	Council Events	Council run sites
	Where certified organic food is used, ensure this is labelled and showcased	✓	✓	✓
Fairtrade	Where food cannot be sourced locally, certified Fairtrade products should be sourced	✓	✓	✓
Waste	Portion sizes are monitored to avoid food waste	✓	✓	✓
	Food waste is segregated and diverted from landfill, following a hierarchy of waste: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensuring we don't over cater in the first instance 2. St Petrocks / Julian House / Community Fridge at Exeter Library 3. Redistribute food where appropriate 4. Anaerobic digestion (review process to achieve) 	✓	✓	✓
	Adhering to Exeter City Council's Single Use Plastic Policy	✓	✓	✓
	Minimising use of food packaging		✓	✓