



Sustainability

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Office of Sustainability Catered Meal Policy

When hosting events and meetings, the Washington University in St. Louis Office of Sustainability has adopted a DefaultVeg dining policy that prioritizes soil regeneration, locally-grown, and BIPOC- and women-owned producers, when possible. A DefaultVeg strategy means that meals offered will be plant-based and when relevant, diners will have the choice to opt in for meals with animal products. Catered meals will aim to be completely plant-based but may include dairy and/or eggs when no specific dietary restrictions exist among diners.

A plant-based dining policy is more *inclusive, sustainable, and economical*.

Inclusive: Having to request special accommodations for meals with peers can be alienating. A DefaultVeg dining policy ensures that all can enjoy a meal together without worrying about most dietary restrictions, as meals within these guidelines accommodate Halal, Kosher, seafood allergies, and vegetarian diets.

Sustainable: Our food system [accounts for one-third](#) of all global greenhouse gas emissions. Studies have shown that serving plant-based meals by default increases their selection by an average of 60%, thus reducing food's greenhouse gas emissions by 40% and water footprint by 24%. With such a policy change, a company of 1,000 employees that serves daily lunch can save over 9 million gallons of water and 350,000 kg of CO₂e over the course of a year.

Economical: [Research shows](#) that restaurants that switch to a plant-based menu can increase revenues and significantly reduce overhead and administrative costs.

General suggested guidelines for dining:

Group Ordering for a Meeting

If you're in charge of ordering meals for a meeting, consider communicating a message similar to the following:

“In order to be both sustainable and inclusive, we will be serving plant-based meals for this event.* If you would like a meal with meat or dairy or have other dietary restrictions, please respond with your request.”

*Here you can include a list of options you’re planning to provide if you’d like!

Individual Ordering for a Meeting

From the menu you’re planning to present to your guests, change the choices to a minimum 3:1 plant-based:animal-based ratio and present plant-based options first. For example, if a restaurant offers 7 meat sandwiches and 3 plant-based sandwiches, offer a menu with 4 options: 3 plant-based sandwiches and 1 meat sandwich. When possible, offer a non-red meat option.

RSVP Forms

When ordering individual meals for a group, use an RSVP process to have individuals specify if they would like a meat option. In the absence of an RSVP form, inform the guests that the meal will be plant-based and they can reach out if they would like a meat option.

Buffets

Choose a plant-based option and offer meat and/or cheese on the side for attendees to add on if they wish. “Build your own” stations are great for this model. Present the plant-based options at the front of the buffet.