



Plant-Powered Carbon Challenge – Program Design

Through our visionary and sustained collective efforts, New York City continues to set the national standard for innovative, ambitious climate action. The Mayor’s Office invites industry leaders from the private, institutional, and nonprofit sectors to accelerate our city’s sustainability initiatives through the Plant-Powered Carbon Challenge. This document details the program design, eligibility, benefits, and requirements for participating in the Plant-Powered Carbon Challenge. For questions or additional information, contact nycfood@cityhall.nyc.gov.

Background

To kick off Earth Week 2023, Mayor Eric Adams presented New York City’s first ever integrated greenhouse gas inventory, which incorporates emissions from the production and consumption of food into calculations of the City’s total emissions footprint. Food-based emissions represent 20% of our overall footprint—the third largest source behind buildings (35%) and transportation (21%).

As part of the City’s commitment to its climate and sustainability goals, the Mayor announced two initiatives to curb food-related emissions: (1) A commitment to reduce absolute carbon emissions from food purchases across City agencies by 33% by 2030; and (2) The Plant-Powered Carbon Challenge, a voluntary program for industry leaders in the private sector to reduce their food emissions by 25% by 2030 through plant-forward food procurement.

We know that different foods have different carbon impacts; red meat and dairy products are the primary source of greenhouse gas emissions in household food consumption. Accordingly, New Yorkers can significantly reduce the City’s emissions by eating more low-carbon plant-based products, such as fruits and vegetables, whole grains, pulses, and legumes.

Our public hospitals and schools have seen enormous success through their plant-powered programs. NYC Health + Hospitals is on track to serve 850,000 plant-based meals to patients in 2023—reducing its food-based carbon emissions by 36% and cutting costs per tray by 59%. And in 2022, NYC public schools launched Plant-Powered Fridays, encouraging future generations to lead the charge in creating a more sustainable food system.

Now, the City looks to its private sector to match its climate targets and take the lead in innovative carbon reduction campaigns through the Plant-Powered Carbon Challenge.

The Challenge

The New York City Mayor’s Office of Food Policy (“Mayor’s Office”) invites our private sector partners to join the Plant-Powered Carbon Challenge and commit to a 25% reduction in food-based carbon emissions by 2030 through plant-forward food procurement.

Program Eligibility

Eligible participants for the Plant-Powered Carbon Challenge include, but are not limited to:

- Food Distributors and Service Providers: Companies that manage dining operations and supply food services to public and private institutions around New York City, such as schools, hospitals, hotels, businesses, and food retailers;
- Corporate Offices: Companies with offices or campuses in New York City that provide food for staff through on-site vendors, staff cafeterias, and/or regularly catered meals;
- Colleges and Universities: Campuses with residential dining halls, cafes and cafeterias, and/or other on-campus dining operations;
- Catering and Event Hospitality Groups: Entities that provide prepared meals for events and/or regular food operations at hotels, special event venues, and private businesses;
- Public Assembly Venues: Sports arenas and stadiums, convention or conference centers, and other large convening spaces with in-house or vendor-based dining services; and
- Restaurant Groups: Organizations that manage restaurant and food retail collections in New York City.

Benefits of the Program

Participants in the Plant-Powered Carbon Challenge will help lead the City's sustainability efforts through innovative, food-based carbon reduction initiatives. Through the Challenge, participants will develop and launch new plant-based meals and dining programs that can be piloted in New York City, and even scaled to cities across the nation. Success in the challenge will yield high-impact, measurable progress on participants' sustainability goals, while offering considerable cost savings and the health benefits of plant-forward diets.

Participating organizations will also have access to a diverse forum of peers, technical experts, and partners that will share best practices, case studies, and industry-specific strategies for incorporating plant-based foods into their food procurement operations.

Challenge participation will also be highly visible through communications from the Mayor's Office, including press releases, media coverage, features on social media, and agency publications and reports.

Program Summary

1. **Accept the Challenge.** Submit a letter addressed to the Mayor's Office of Food Policy on your organization's official letterhead committing to a 25% reduction in food-based carbon emissions by 2030 through plant-forward food procurement.
2. **Track carbon emissions.** Calculate the carbon footprint of your existing food procurement practices using the World Resources Institute's [Coolfood Calculator](#), or another calculator of your choice that

analyzes the carbon impact of animal-based foods. Organizations should set their baseline at earliest year that robust procurement data is available.

3. **Develop an action plan.** Determine the food environments in which your organization will be modifying its procurement practices and identify the specific changes (with measurable carbon impacts) that you will make. Work with your food distributors, culinary teams, and vendors to plan the sourcing of plant-based products and develop plant-based recipes. Set short- and long-term milestones that align with a 25% or more reduction target by 2030. Submit this action plan to the Mayor's Office of Food Policy, ideally within one month of accepting the Challenge.
4. **Launch.** Implement your organization's action plan and keep records of your new food purchasing data, which will be used to calculate your new carbon footprint and progress towards your 25% reduction target. At three months and six months after your organization has accepted the Challenge, the Mayor's Office of Food Policy will follow up about your implementation of the program, and offer any support needed to modify or supplement your action plan.
5. **Submit an annual progress report.** One year after your organization has accepted the Challenge, and every year on that date until 2030, submit a report to the Mayor's Office of Food Policy that includes: (1) a calculation of your food-based carbon emissions during your baseline year, (2) a calculation of the previous year's food-based carbon emissions, (3) expected food-based carbon emissions for the following year and forecasted progress towards your 25% reduction target, and (4) a detailed summary of the plant-based procurement you have implemented in your food operations. The Mayor's Office will review this report and certify your organization's continued participation in the Challenge, as well as offer further support for meeting or exceeding your reduction target.

Resources

The Mayor's Office of Food Policy can connect your organization with leading technical experts that can direct or offer assistance with:

- measuring and tracking your food-based carbon emissions,
- analyzing your current menus and suggesting plant-based modifications to make in your food operations,
- developing new plant-based recipes and providing culinary training,
- labeling, branding, and marketing new plant-based programs, and
- launching and evaluating the success of a pilot program.

Our partners include Greener by Default, HowGood, and Coolfood at the World Resources Institute, as well as other local and national organizations with resources for GHG tracking and sustainable food procurement.

Additionally, the Mayor's Office of Food Policy can offer guidance on creating an action plan and associated food procurement strategies—for example, reviewing language in RFPs for food vendors to emphasize plant-based menus, or sharing sample menus and action plans from Challenge participants across sectors.

Finally, Challenge participants are encouraged to make use of the Plant-Powered Carbon Challenge badge in their marketing materials, food labeling, social media and press portfolios, and ESG and sustainability reports.