

A catering guide for  
large-scale events

# FUTURE PLATES



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# INTRODUCTION

Sustainability is now on everyone's radar. **Food systems** are responsible for around a **third of global greenhouse gas emissions**,<sup>1,2,3</sup> with meat and dairy products being among the major emitters and thus one of the largest contributors to climate change.<sup>4,5,6</sup>

While we understand that the world is not going to immediately shift to a fully plant-based diet, we also know that small changes can make a big difference, and that the more often sustainable options are presented as the default option, the more quickly such options will be normalised.

Beyond encouraging broad behavioural shifts, it makes sense for the United Nations (UN) and climate-change organisations to serve more plant-based meals. By serving more plant-based dishes more often at international climate events, the climate sector is putting its money where its mouth is.



The global food system is responsible for a



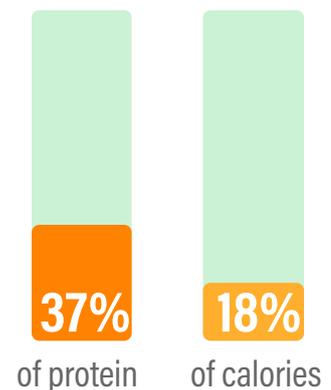
**Animal-based** foods are responsible for up to



**Animal-based** foods use



But they only provide



Moving towards more sustainable and resilient food systems is a complex process that varies between regions. Tradition and culture play a crucial role in everyone’s eating habits – what works in Europe won’t necessarily work in South America. However, promoting sustainable catering at large-scale international events is an easy first step to showcase the benefits of sustainable diets to a large number of people, particularly in the case of the UN, given the organisation’s stated commitment to sustainability. **UN institutions are in a key position** to pave the way toward more sustainable food systems, showing Member

States what can be achieved by influencing eating habits.

From this point forward, catering at UN events, especially those held under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), should systematically respond to sustainability criteria. **Promoting sustainable plant-rich meals** at events such as the COP climate events could help to make sustainable food more front-of-centre, and **help lead to food and agricultural policies** that integrate consumption and production items into **National Action Plans**.



**DID YOU KNOW?**

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



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.

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

# WHY GO MORE PLANT BASED?

Implementing sustainable catering practices  
is beneficial for a variety of reasons

## FOR THE CONSUMERS



### PLANT-BASED FOODS ARE DELICIOUS

Today's international guests are always looking for new and exciting taste experiences. The emerging plant-based food sector is a rich source of innovation that can help to provide the novelty and variety that consumers crave. A plant-based diet often serves as a **gateway to leaving the familiar path and exploring** new products, flavours, and ways of preparing food, while finding inspiration in the latest food science and culinary traditions from around the world.

For flexitarians and reducers, taste is often the key deal-maker or -breaker when it comes to plant-based products and recipes. Impress your guests with delicious taste experiences, and they will be more likely to choose a plant-based option, regardless of their usual dietary preferences or regional backgrounds.

A **flexitarian** is someone who regularly eats plant-based meals, as well as animal-based ones, while a **reducer** is someone who is taking action to reduce their consumption of animal-based products. Together, these two groups represent almost half of consumers in many countries and account for the bulk of plant-based purchases.<sup>7</sup>



### PLANT-BASED FOODS ARE HEALTHY

It is now widely accepted that a balanced plant-based diet offers numerous health benefits compared to a diet centred on animal-based products. While animal-centred diets carry several health risks, **a rich and varied plant-based diet can offer prevention and help reverse modern lifestyle diseases**, including type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and some forms of cancer.<sup>8,9,10</sup> Since food-producing animals are reservoirs for many foodborne pathogens, the risk of zoonosis can be

considerably reduced by shifting towards a more plant-based diet.

Plant-based foods contain no dietary cholesterol and provide a plethora of vitamins, minerals, and secondary plant compounds, all of which play an important role in human health. Another substance which is only found in plants – and is notoriously lacking in the typical modern diet – is dietary fibre. Fibre can help to manage hunger and satiety, provides nutrients for beneficial gut

bacteria, is protective against some types of cancers, and helps with maintaining a healthy weight. More importantly, it brings regularity to the bowels by facilitating the digestion of food. Fruits and vegetables also contain high amounts of water, which provides additional hydration.

**Long-term studies** have provided valuable evidence of the health effects of a plant-based diet compared to an animal-centred diet. These studies show that people who follow plant-based diets have much healthier cholesterol levels.<sup>13 14</sup>

In addition, a balanced plant-based diet and a diet low in saturated fat can help to maintain a healthy weight and lower blood pressure. People who eat a plant-based diet have a significantly lower risk of obesity;<sup>15</sup> type 2 diabetes, and heart disease than those who eat a diet that is rich in animal-based products. A well-planned plant-based diet is suitable for every stage of life, including infancy, adolescence, pregnancy and lactation, and old age.<sup>16 17</sup>

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## PLANT-BASED FOODS ARE MORE INCLUSIVE

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By their nature, many large-scale events attract attendees from all around the world, bringing together many different cultures, all of whom have their own culinary traditions and personal dietary preferences. Plant-based meals (free from dairy, eggs, fish, and meat) provide a more inclusive option, accommodating a wide range of dietary preferences and restrictions. Plant-based recipes

tend to avoid many of the most common allergens, and are appropriate for religious, cultural, vegan and vegetarian diets. Kosher foods include “all products that grow in the soil or on plants, bushes, or trees,”<sup>18</sup> while halal foods include all fruits and vegetables.<sup>19</sup> By providing a single meal that caters for all needs, caterers can simplify meal planning, save time, and reduce costs.

# FOR THE PLANET



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## PLANT-BASED EATING IS BETTER FOR GLOBAL HEALTH

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A plant-based diet also positively impacts global health, which is inherently linked to the current state of animal agriculture. Animals can become carriers of germs such as viruses, bacteria, parasites and fungi. Through direct and indirect contact, these germs can be transferred to humans, leading to life-threatening illnesses and even pandemics. This transfer can occur between living animals and humans (e.g. factory workers

and farmers), and also between animal-based products and humans (e.g. swine flu, salmonella, E.coli). It is estimated that 75% of newly emerging infectious diseases are zoonoses and that 60% of infectious diseases are spread from animals.<sup>20 21</sup> With a simple reduction of animal-based products in our diets, we can significantly decrease the risk of zoonotic diseases such as COVID-19 and their threat to global health.



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## PLANT-BASED EATING IS BETTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

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A plant-based diet can have numerous positive effects on the environment. Due to high levels of land, water, and energy consumption, meat and dairy products are highly inefficient. Animal farming is a major cause of many key environmental problems, including greenhouse gas emissions, deforestation, and biodiversity loss. As well as its many other benefits, a shift to plant-based diets is one of the simplest and most effective ways to tackle climate change. On an individual level, plant-based diets generally have a carbon footprint that is up to 50% lower than current average western diets.<sup>22</sup> Individual plant-based products also have a smaller carbon footprint than their animal-based counterparts – up to 90% in some cases.

The United Nations has recognised the significance and urgency of climate change, with its institutions increasingly emphasising the emergency at hand and encouraging Member States to take the needed actions. With the growing concern about the impact of climate change, attendees at climate change conferences are likely to feel concerned if they find the same unsustainable consumption that fuels the crisis present at the event itself. This is relevant not only to the UN climate COPs, but to all UN events. The UN should take the lead and provide signals and examples of environmental sustainability, beginning with the catering.

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## PLANT-BASED DIETS CAN IMPROVE FOOD SECURITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

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It is expected that the Earth's population will reach about 10 billion by 2050.<sup>23</sup> The question of how to feed a growing global population has never been more urgent. Achieving food security for everyone means rethinking animal agriculture and shifting

towards resource-efficient plant-based foods. If all crops were grown exclusively for direct human consumption, there would be enough food to feed the Earth's population by 2050.<sup>24 25 26</sup>

## PLANT-BASED EATING IS BETTER FOR THE LIVES OF ANIMALS

Lastly, there is growing research and awareness about farmed animals' intelligence and their social and emotional capabilities. Mother hens feel stress when they observe their chicks experiencing the same emotion, pigs can complete complex tasks, and fish recognise their reflection in a mirror, proving visual self-awareness. Over the last few decades, science has confirmed what every child knows – that animals are conscious and sentient. Globally, the rights and welfare of animals used

for the production of meat, milk and eggs have been an essential driver of demand for plant-based foods from the very beginning of the world's various vegetarian movements, and continue to be a powerful force for change. Being more open to serving plant-based food would not only provide all the benefits mentioned above, but would also support the growing recognition of animal sentience and the need for improved animal welfare.<sup>30</sup>



## FOR THE ACCOUNTANTS



### AFFORDABILITY

Plant-based ingredients, such as vegetables, legumes and fruits, and meals are also often more affordable than meat and meat-based dishes. This is because animal-based products are among the most costly food items, which is understandable given that they require significantly more

resources. By including more plant-based foods and dishes in your catering – and reducing meat-based ingredients and items – you can save money. Plant-based whole foods, in particular, tend to be significantly more affordable than meat-based meals.

While showcasing innovative plant-based alternatives and new food and farming technologies at UN events can be exciting and highly valuable, simply reducing the number of animal-based options, replacing animal-based protein with plant-based protein, and increasing the number of meals centred around

legumes, whole grains, and vegetables can lead to significant savings – in terms of both climate emissions and financial costs. Cumulatively, the savings per plate can result in a substantial reduction in catering costs, particularly at large-scale UN events!

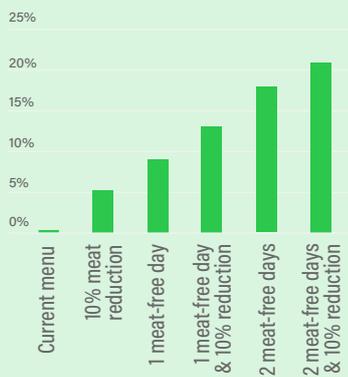
## School Plates Interventions by ProVeg UK - Benefits for climate, health and budget

### CLIMATE



✔ **66% less CO2**

#### CO2 emissions reduced through menu changes



### HEALTH



- ✔ **30% more fibre**
- ✔ **14% more protein**
- ✔ **87% lower in saturated fat**
- ✔ **Increase in fibre**
- ✔ **More plants on menus**
- ✔ **More plant-based meal options for all**
- ✔ **Reduction in red and processed meat**

#### 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.

### BUDGET



✔ **43% cheaper**

#### 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.





# BEST

# PRACTICES

In this section, we look at some of the most effective best practices for professional catering at international conferences and UN events. Implementing these practices can have multiple positive effects on the climate, including co-benefits.



## SUBSTITUTION

Substitution entails **swapping animal-based ingredients** in recipes for **plant-based alternatives** (for example, using tofu instead of chicken breast, or oat milk instead of cow's milk). Begin with sauces, dressings and desserts – as these substitutions are often simple and don't affect taste or texture. Substitution techniques that have been shown to be effective include:



**Creating new condiments** (such as sauces or dips) to complement plant-based dishes, or enhancing the ones you currently use.



Showcasing the most **visually appealing** ingredients.



Improving the **flavour** and **texture** of plant-based dishes.<sup>31</sup>

## CASE STUDY

### Plant-based substitutions in IKEA's cafeteria menus

Global furnishing brand IKEA is famous for its traditional Swedish meatballs, which it serves in the stores' cafeterias. In 2015, the company decided to expand its selection of plant-based products<sup>32</sup> **by replacing animal-based ingredients in key dishes with plant-based alternatives**, such as offering plant-based meatballs with plant-based gravy, recreating the well-known traditional dish.

By making simple substitutions of animal-based ingredients, such as swapping cow's

milk with plant-based milk, **IKEA was able to expand its bouquet of products** without compromising on flavour or price.

Proof of the success of substitution can be seen in the numbers: in its latest sustainability report<sup>33</sup> IKEA reported a continuously positive trend of customers choosing plant-based food, with the share of sales rising for products such as the plant-based meat balls and the plant-based veggie hotdogs.



# REDUCTION

**Reduce** the amount of animal-based products, such as meat, fish, dairy and eggs, in your recipes by simultaneously **increasing the amount of vegetables**, legumes, nuts, and seeds. This method is especially well-suited for customers who want to consume animal-based products more consciously without completely eliminating them. Examples of reduction techniques include **blending** plant-based ingredients into ground-meat dishes (e.g. kidney beans or oat flakes in patties), **reducing the portion sizes of meat** dishes, **increasing the proportion of plant-based dishes** available compared to meat-based dishes, and making all **side dishes plant-based**.<sup>34</sup>



The EAT-Lancet Plate

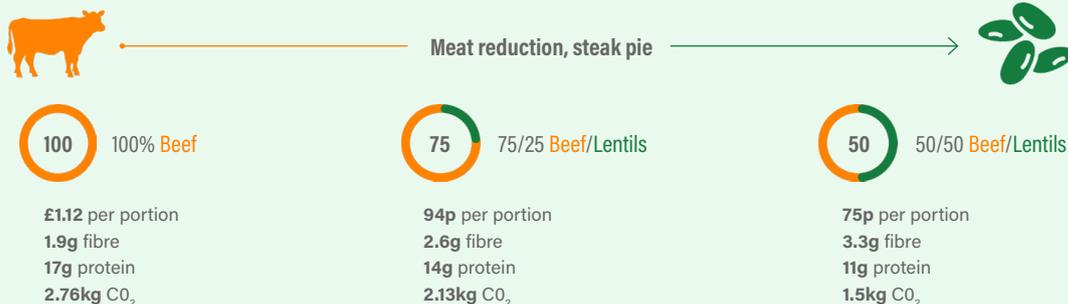
## CASE STUDY The Cool Food Pledge at the World Bank Cafeteria

As part of its sustainability efforts, the World Bank’s head office in Washington DC decided to reduce its environmental impact by addressing food-procurement emissions. In 2020, they embarked on a partnership with the World Resource Institute to implement the Cool Food Pledge,<sup>35</sup> a project aimed at reducing the total amount of food-related greenhouse gas emissions by 25% by 2030.<sup>36</sup>

Since then, World Bank cafeterias, bars, and catering have started to reduce meat in their food offerings by blending plant-

based ingredients in meat dishes (mixing mushrooms into beef burgers), decreasing the portion size of meat dishes, increasing the proportion of plant-based dishes in the menu, and establishing specific days on which all the menu items are completely plant-based (the ‘Plant Power Days’ initiative).

For large institutions, small actions like these help to reduce emissions from food procurement, without any negative impact on the satisfaction of employees or consumers.



The cost and CO2 emissions reductions from using the ‘blending technique’ in a steak pie.<sup>37</sup>



Use **small, neutral icons to inform** your customers about key meal ingredients. Taking this approach means that customers who are looking for the information will find it, while other customers will not be put off by overly conspicuous labelling! For example, plant-based meals can be labelled with a leaf, a flower, a carrot, or a small 'v.' You can also try featuring appealing images of plant-based dishes, colour-coding menus or using sustainability symbols so that plant-based options can be easily recognised. Another technique that has proved effective in shifting customer preferences is the use of indulgent and enticing language. Use words and phrases that highlight the flavour, taste, and umami aspects of a meal, rather than simply prefixing the names of plant-based dishes with 'meat-free' or 'vegetarian'.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to the suggestions above, informational materials such as **on-site posters** can help to inform customers about the **benefits of plant-based foods** – and the **climate impacts of the meals they're eating**. For example, you could provide information on how many greenhouse gas emissions were avoided by implementing a new menu line, or provide comparisons between different menu items. To amplify the message, all this could be complemented with promotion on the relevant social media channels, as well as on television screens and informative leaflets at events.<sup>39</sup>

## CASE STUDY

### Klimato carbon footprint labels at COP26

These messaging techniques can be implemented at small gatherings and large-scale international events without adding much workload during the event itself. In 2021, the organisers of the **United Nations Climate Change Conference in Glasgow – COP26** – decided to put an **extensive informational campaign in place**, with the goal of showcasing plant-based eating as a particularly effective strategy to fight climate change. Carbon footprint labels were displayed on menus and posters, while digital screens highlighted the climate benefits of plant-based foods. Food was as locally sourced as possible, and plant-rich meals were clearly indicated.

Providing this information enabled participants to make **informed choices** about their meals, directing them to the lower-carbon, more plant-forward items. This led to almost 40% of purchased options inside the Blue Zone being plant-based, a percentage that climbs to almost 60% when including vegetarian options!<sup>40</sup>





## INCLUSION

A plate with meat in the centre and two veggies on the side is a thing of the past. Instead, use modern serving techniques (buffet, building blocks, bowls) to ensure that **there is an option for every need and preference**. Plant-based meals (free from dairy, eggs, fish, and meat) can provide a more inclusive option for a diverse customer base, especially at a large-scale international conference that needs to accommodate a wide range of dietary preferences and restrictions. Plant-based recipes tend to avoid many of the most common allergens (e.g. lactose, eggs) and are usually also appropriate for customers who follow religious, cultural, vegetarian, or vegan diets.

### CASE STUDY

#### Inclusive plant-based catering at the World Economic Forum in Davos

One approach to ensuring inclusiveness is giving customers **the freedom to choose between many different ingredients** rather than adapting a set plate or menu to various preferences. Such an approach is particularly useful at international events, where a large variety of preferences need to be accommodated.

The organisers of the World Economic Forum in Davos have embraced this approach as an easy way to ensure that their meal offerings cater to diverse dietary requirements. Conference attendees

choose between different grains, proteins, and vegetables at buffet-style meal stations. Many of the options are plant-based, thus **ensuring dietary, cultural, and religious inclusivity** (since plant-based meals usually meet Halal, Kosher, and allergen-free requirements).<sup>41</sup>

This strategy also leads to a smaller environmental footprint and less food waste (since customers decide their own portions) – while increasing overall satisfaction for attendees.




WORLD  
ECONOMIC  
FORUM



# NUDGING

Try to **motivate your customers to indirectly make healthier and/or more sustainable choices** through positive naming of meals, smart menu design, attractive physical presentation, and strategically sound countertop placement.

Nudging techniques can involve layering different approaches. For example, you can include **plant-based meat alternatives in the meat section**,<sup>42</sup> while also making sure

that there is a dedicated plant-rich section. **Pricing strategies** can also help nudge customers towards plant-based options, for example, by using cross-product promotions or ‘meal deals’ on plant-based mains and side dishes, drinks, and desserts.<sup>43</sup>

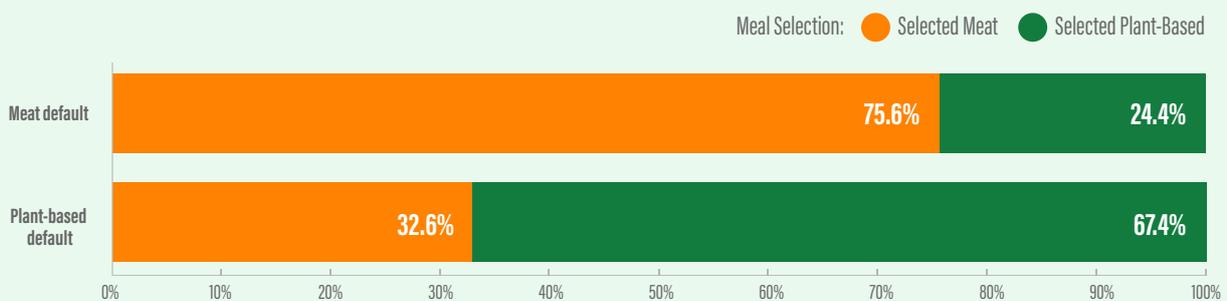
In general, listing all options as **plant-based by default**, while allowing people to add or substitute animal options, is the most powerful menu nudge, while also preserving freedom of choice.<sup>44</sup> Listing the plant-based options first in each section of the menu has also been shown to increase the number of plant-based meals chosen by customers.

## CASE STUDY The effects of nudging at a Vancouver University dining hall

An experiment that took place in Vancouver University in 2022 shows the power of using nudges to change behaviour. At one of the university’s dining halls, **six different nudges** were used, with the goal of increasing the amount of plant-based food purchased.

These implementations included **better placement of plant-based options**, the introduction of a Chef’s ‘featured special’, **verbal recommendations** from dining-hall staff, **promotion on social-media** channels and via posters in the dining hall, and **taste-focused labelling**.

Sales data from meals purchased during the intervention period were compared with sales data from two control periods. The results show that the nudging techniques were successful in **increasing the amount of plant-based food sold**, with **plant-based purchases growing by between 53% and 56%**. This is clear evidence that nudging can have a notably positive effect on consumers’ dietary choices.



ProVeg’s adaptation of the study by Boronowsky et al. 2022, showing that when the plant-based option is set as the default one, customers will generally choose that option rather than requesting the meat-based one. Original visualisation realised for the policy brief of public food procurement - <https://proveg.org/policy/the-power-of-public-food-procurement/>



## TRAINING

When your whole catering team gets behind change and innovations, it becomes easier to include novel meals in your offerings. Dedicated **plant-based training can help your catering team** (including chefs and, importantly, service staff) to gain confidence in plant-based cooking skills and techniques, discover more about the benefits of plant-based nutrition as well as the positive impact on our planet, and learn to use familiar favourites as the basis for creating delicious, plant-based meals.<sup>46</sup>

### CASE STUDY

#### ProVeg UK's School Plates initiative

A UK multi-academy trust caterer serving 5,000 children partnered with the ProVeg School Plates team to make their school menus more sustainable through a plant-forward approach.

By implementing evidence-based strategies – such as behaviour nudges, improved dish positioning, positive menu descriptions, and enhancing the quality and quantity of plant-based options – the caterer achieved significant results and was recognised with a School Plates Silver menu award.

After attending in-person training and adopting these changes, the caterer reduced their carbon emissions by 26.5%, increased their plant-based menu items by 24%, and now offers 40% of their meals as plant-based. These initiatives not only led to a 20% increase in meal uptake but also delivered a 20% cost saving, demonstrating the power of sustainable, plant-forward practices in school catering.

*“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.”*

**Catering Manager at  
Multi-Academy Trust, UK**



# CASE STUDIES FOR

# PLANT-BASED AT SCALE

Over the last few years, some large-scale events and institutions have started leading by example and incorporating sustainable, plant-rich catering practices into their overall operations strategy.

## COP28

At the **COP28 UN Climate Change Conference** in Dubai, the catering was **two-thirds plant-based**. This shift towards a predominantly plant-based menu was of huge significance, given the impact that modern diets have on climate change. By making this decision, COP28 organisers put the issue of food and its potential contributions to climate-change mitigation on the COP agenda, reflecting a global recognition of the fact that we need to change our diet if we are to address climate change.

As part of this approach, COP28's 1.5°C-aligned menu was designed to enable delegates **to eat within a 'daily food budget'**, calculated to curb global warming to less than 1.5 degrees Celsius – the limit agreed under the 2015 Paris Agreement.

COP28 also included a **fully plant-based food park**, with varied plant-based vendor options from around the world, plant-based cooking demonstrations from celebrity chefs, and 'foodprint' labels that provided the carbon footprint and water footprint of each item.

COP28 also hosted a **climate-conscious catering workshop**, which preceded the large-scale event and helped to prepare chefs, caterers, and related companies and organisations for the sustainable catering requirements of the conference.



## PARIS OLYMPICS

The catering services at the **Olympic and Paralympic Games Paris 2024** were provided by Sodexo Live!,<sup>47</sup> who put sustainability at the heart of their catering strategy for the event. The brief for the catering menu was that it needed to cover the nutritional requirements of the athletes while also having a low impact on the environment. For this purpose, both the nutritional values and the environmental-impact metrics were displayed for each dish in the Olympic canteens.<sup>48</sup>

Additionally, **vegetarian meals were available** to the public at all the performance venues and sites, including classics such as a veggie hot dog and nuggets, veggie pasta dishes, and vegan ice creams. Visitors were directly encouraged to try the plant-based food through prominently displayed **large-scale banners and posters**. Capturing the spirit of the event, these appealing promotional mechanisms featured the official Paris 2024 Olympic mascot and playful slogans.

Sodexo's aim was to have **60% of the meals vegetarian**. Serving up to 40,000 meals a day for the duration of the Games, Sodexo Live!'s Olympic performance is a great example of sustainable catering at scale.<sup>49</sup>



# NEW YORK CITY

Between 2019 and 2023, New York City achieved a **29% decrease in its total food-related emissions** – and a 44% reduction in emissions per 1,000 calories – by reducing its purchases of animal-based products, particularly beef.

Additionally, the New York City Health and Hospitals programme achieved a 36% reduction in emissions, simply by making the **daily ‘Chef’s Recommendation’ a plant-based option by default** across all 11 public hospitals in the city, first for lunch, and then for dinner. Since 2022, **two million plant-based meals have been served**, while patient satisfaction has remained high, at **98%**.<sup>50 51</sup>

New York’s Department of Health also updated the New York City Food Standards, which now include evidence-based nutrition criteria for all foods purchased with city dollars, and require every agency to serve at least one plant-based protein per week for each meal type, while processed meats will be phased out by 2025.

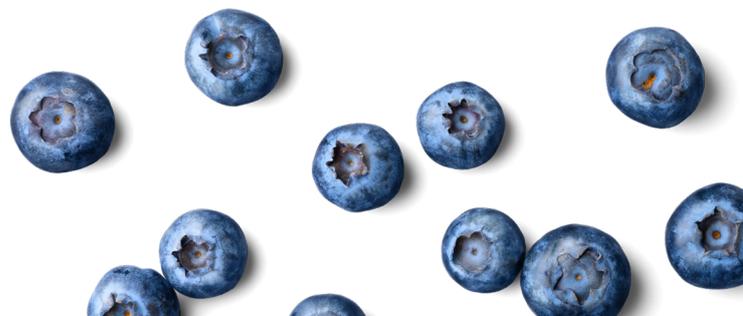
New York City is also making, and pushing forward, further commitments. It has **pledged to reduce the city’s food-related emissions by 33% by 2030**, and is leading the **Plant-Powered Carbon Challenge**, which secures commitments from major NYC-connected corporations to reduce their food-related emissions by 25% by 2030.<sup>52</sup>

Another key initiative has been instituting **Plant-Powered Fridays in public schools**, with school

menus now including plant-based items such as chickpea shawarmas, lentil bolognese with elbow macaroni, veggie nuggets, falafel, fajita veggie burgers, greek zucchini salads, and more.

Independent reports confirm that NYC Public Schools reduced their environmental footprint through plant-forward menuing interventions such as Plant-Powered Fridays. Between 2018 and 2022, schools’ per-student emissions were reduced by 40%, water footprint by a third, and land footprint by 50% – simply by serving more plant-based proteins and fewer animal proteins.

New York City’s work in schools also includes plant-forward culinary training through their ‘Chefs in the Schools’ programme. Culinary training for preparing and cooking plant-based meals is also offered for New York City’s largest jail, as well as at two juvenile justice centres. By taking multiple approaches, New York City exemplifies the **wide variety of impactful strategies** that can be used to make food services more sustainable.<sup>53</sup>





## TRELLIS GROUP

Since 2015, Trellis Group (formerly GreenBiz) has been actively working to **reduce the carbon footprint of its event menus by eliminating red meat**, expanding **vegetarian and vegan offerings**, and implementing **waste reduction** measures. In 2022, Trellis experimented with a fully vegetarian conference, but found that both venue culinary teams and attendees were not fully prepared for the transition. As a result, limited amounts of white meat and fish were reintroduced, while still ensuring that 75% of meals served are vegan or vegetarian.

With guidance from Greener By Default, Trellis has saved over **25,000 kg of CO2 emissions through plant-based menu swaps**. The company continues to donate surplus food to local organisations, and collaborates with venues to minimise both organic and material waste through innovative buffet design and composting initiatives.

After three years of engagement and training with event venues in order to enhance their delicious plant-based offerings and reduce waste, Trellis's sustainability efforts are showing clear progress. In 2024, for example, the JW Marriott Phoenix Desert Ridge had almost no vegan options. Just a year later, and the venue has developed an entire menu dedicated to high-quality vegan dishes. Trellis's attendees appreciate the thoughtful and inclusive menu design and the opportunity to explore more plant-based meals, regardless of their personal dietary preferences.

## TED COUNTDOWN

TED Countdown events take a **plant-forward approach to catering** – designing menus in which vegetables, grains, legumes, and alternative proteins aren't afterthoughts but the main event. The goal is to offer meals that are **vibrant, globally inspired, and satisfying, while keeping sustainability and inclusivity top of mind**. While some events have been fully plant-based, TED Countdown also recognises the importance of cultural context when planning menus. By trying to strike the right balance, they move the conversation forward while staying respectful of local food traditions.





Oat milk is the standard beverage at all barista bars across TED events, a small but meaningful shift that supports the organisation's low-impact goals and which has been widely embraced by attendees.

They also use subtle but intentional design strategies – such as listing vegetarian and plant-based options at the top of menus instead of at the bottom – in order to help shift default choices without putting pressure on guests. They work with partners like Klimato to measure the footprint of their food offerings, and collect survey feedback to understand what's working and where they can improve. It's an approach that continues to evolve – but so far, it's been met with a lot of enthusiasm, and it's something that the team is committed to building on.



## FINLAND

Finland is one of the leading countries when it comes to plant-based catering. The capital city of **Helsinki has committed to halving its meat and dairy consumption by 2025**, while the country's 'Plant Foods for Climate campaign'<sup>54</sup> offers 59 sustainable plant-based main-course recipes, as well as side dishes and desserts, that have been designed **specifically for mass-catering services**.

One of the most notable achievements in Finland was **Slush 2024**,<sup>55</sup> Europe's leading startup event, which served almost entirely plant-based meals, as well as a few vegetarian options, to its 13,000 attendees. This shift in meal content **reduced the event's food-related emissions by almost 50%**. In the same year, the Jussi Awards,<sup>56</sup> Finland's equivalent of the Oscars, served a **fully plant-based menu**.

Numerous organisations in Finland have embraced a plant-based catering policy, meaning that they serve only plant-based meals at their meetings and events. This approach has become increasingly common. At the University of Turku, for example, both the School of Economics and the Faculty of Medicine have decided to serve exclusively plant-based food<sup>57</sup> at all their events and activities.



# RECIPES



To make everyone's lives easier, and to provide some simple inspiration for large-scale event catering, we've compiled a selection of recipes that are easily replicable for a large number of guests. All the recipes are for 10 servings, so quantities can be easily adjusted.

## STARTERS

# Celeriac-apple salad

10 SERVINGS

**For the salad**

500 g celeriac  
250 g apples  
200 g carrots  
30 ml lemon juice

**For the dressing**

80 g vegan mayonnaise  
5 g salt (more, to taste)  
1 g white pepper  
20 ml apple cider vinegar  
20 g agave syrup

**Additionally**

125 g red grapes, seedless  
125 g white grapes, seedless

**INSTRUCTIONS****FOR THE CELERIAC SALAD**

1. First, wash, peel, and cut the celeriac into thin stripes.
2. Then wash, core, and cut the apples into thin stripes, and wash, peel, and thickly grate the carrots.
3. Put the veggies in a bowl and mix well. Add the lemon juice and mix again.

**FOR THE DRESSING**

In a bowl, mix the mayonnaise, salt, pepper, apple cider vinegar, and agave syrup into a thick dressing.

**TO SERVE**

Pour the dressing over the salad and mix well. Wash and cut the grapes in half, mix into the salad, and serve.



## STARTERS

# Jackfruit tuna salad

10 SERVINGS

## For the jackfruit-tuna marinade

10 g capers  
10 ml tamari sauce  
10 ml rice vinegar  
5 ml caper water  
10 ml no fish sauce

## For the jackfruit tuna

340 g young jackfruit in brine, drained

## For the salad

240 g cooked white beans  
70 g radishes

40 g red onion  
100 g pickled cucumber  
150 g vegan mayonnaise  
10 g dill, chopped  
salt and pepper, to taste  
170 g lettuce



## INSTRUCTIONS

### FOR THE JACKFRUIT-TUNA MARINADE

Put all the ingredients for the tuna marinade in a blender and process until smooth.

### FOR THE JACKFRUIT TUNA

1. Rinse and drain the jackfruit and pull it apart in threads.
2. Put the pulled jackfruit on a baking pan and pour the marinade over it.
3. Mix well until all the jackfruit is covered, then put in the oven.
4. Grill at 200°C for about 20 minutes.
5. Take out of the oven and let cool.

### FOR THE SALAD

6. In a salad bowl, roughly mash the white beans with a fork or a potato masher.
7. Finely chop the radishes, onion, and pickles, and add to the mashed beans.
8. Add the mayonnaise and the dill, and mix well.
9. If the consistency is too thick, add a bit of the pickle brine and mix into the cooled jackfruit tuna.
10. Add some salt and pepper to taste.
11. Mix and serve on salad leaves.
12. Garnish with some extra dill, radishes, or chopped chives.



## STARTERS

# Beetroot and mint hummus

10 SERVINGS

500 g can of chickpeas

325 g beetroots cooked

20 g tahini

10 g fresh mint

50 ml lemon juice

5 g fresh garlic

25 ml olive oil

Salt and black pepper, to taste



## INSTRUCTIONS

### FOR THE HUMMUS

1. First, blend the tahini and lemon juice for a light, fluffy base.
2. Add chickpeas, garlic, olive oil, salt, and pepper. Blend until smooth.
3. Toss in the beetroot and mint, and blend again until you get a vibrant pink hummus.
4. Taste and adjust seasoning or lemon juice to your liking.
5. Serve with pita, veggie sticks, or crackers. Garnish with olive oil, mint leaves, and chickpeas.



## MAIN COURSES

# French bean casserole

10 SERVINGS

**2 kg** beans (e.g. haricot, cannellini, or butter beans)  
**250 g** plant-based sausages  
**40 g** celery stalks, chopped  
**200 g** carrots, chopped  
**150 g** onion, finely chopped

**10 g** fresh garlic, finely chopped  
**250 ml** white wine (see notes)  
**25 ml** olive oil  
**10 g** dried thyme  
**3** bay leaves  
Salt and black pepper, to taste



## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Cut the sausages into small pieces, around 3 cm long.
2. Peel and finely dice the onion and garlic. Wash the celery and carrot, then roughly chop into 3-cm pieces.
3. Put a medium-sized pot on medium heat and add a tablespoon of olive oil. When the oil starts to shimmer, add the sausage pieces, turning occasionally until golden on all sides. Remove the sausage pieces from the pot and set aside.
4. Add the other tablespoon of olive oil to the pot, then add the diced onion, celery, and carrot. Season with a pinch of salt and cook for 5 minutes, or until the vegetables have softened. Add the garlic and cook for another minute.
5. Stir in the white wine (see notes), making sure to scrape any browned bits off the bottom of the pot with a wooden spoon, and let it reduce for 2 minutes.
6. Add the beans to the pot, along with the bay leaf and thyme. Return the sausage pieces to the pot. Season gently with the salt and black pepper.
7. Once the stew begins to boil, reduce the heat to a gentle simmer. Cook for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Serve with rice for a Sunday lunch or with crusty bread for a hearty dinner. Enjoy your meal!



## MAIN COURSES

# Chickpea curry

10 SERVINGS

750 g rice  
1,200 g tomatoes  
2 kg chickpeas  
100 g mustard seeds

75 g curry powder  
100 g sesame seeds  
25 ml sunflower oil  
100 g fresh coriander



## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat half of the sunflower oil in a saucepan. Add half of the mustard seeds and wait until they start to pop.
2. Add the rice and fry briefly until it becomes glassy. Add plenty of boiling water and some salt, and let everything boil until the rice is well cooked. Afterwards, drain the water.
3. Meanwhile, you can prepare the curry. Begin by cutting the tomatoes into cubes.
4. Heat up the rest of the oil and the mustard seeds in a frying pan, until the seeds begin to fry.
5. Throw in the tomatoes and the curry powder, and fry until the tomatoes start to fall apart.
6. Rinse the chickpeas with cold water in a sieve or colander, add them to the tomatoes and sesame seeds, and cook for about five minutes.
7. Serve with fresh coriander, and season with salt and pepper.



## MAIN COURSES

# Mushroom risotto

10 SERVINGS

<b>500 g</b> Arborio rice	<b>100 g</b> sun-dried tomatoes, cut into pieces	<b>15 g</b> fresh parsley, chopped
<b>5 g</b> fresh garlic, peeled and chopped	<b>400 g</b> mushrooms, scrubbed and cut into pieces	<b>5 g</b> lemon rind, grated
<b>130 g</b> onion, peeled and chopped	<b>250 g</b> green peas, frozen	<b>100 ml</b> lemon juice
<b>10 g</b> vegan butter	<b>1650 ml</b> vegetable broth	salt and black pepper, to taste
<b>15 ml</b> olive oil plus <b>10 ml</b> olive oil for frying the mushrooms	<b>200 ml</b> white wine	<b>15 g</b> nutritional yeast flakes (optional)



## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat the olive oil together with the vegan butter in a deep pan.
2. Fry the onion and garlic, and then add the rice.
3. Stir well until the rice becomes glassy – from that moment, the rice is ready to absorb moisture.
4. Deglaze the pan with white wine and keep stirring until the rice has absorbed the white wine.
5. Add the vegetable broth a dash at a time, stirring until the rice has absorbed the broth before adding the next dash. This should take about fifteen to twenty minutes.
6. In the meantime, heat some oil in the frying pan, and fry the mushrooms until golden brown. Season with salt and pepper.
7. About five minutes before the rice is ready, add the peas and sun-dried tomatoes.
8. Cook the rice until done. The rice should be smooth but also have a slight crunch.
9. Add the mushrooms, a dash of lemon juice, some lemon zest, the fresh parsley, and a dash of nutritional yeast.



## MAIN COURSES

## Shepherd's pie

10 SERVINGS

500 g carrots  
 1 kg peas (fresh or frozen)  
 10 g fresh garlic  
 300 g onions  
 50 ml olive oil  
 25 g dried thyme  
 25 g dried rosemary

875 g plant-based minced meat **OR** 430 g dry soy **OR** pea granules soaked in 860 ml vegetable stock for 15 minutes **OR** 430 g brown dry lentils /875 g cooked lentils  
 25 g tomato paste

2 kg canned diced tomatoes  
 250 ml red wine  
 375 ml vegetable stock  
 2.25 kg mashed potatoes  
 375 g plant-based cheese



## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 180 °C.
2. Slice the carrot, chop the onion, and finely chop the garlic.
3. Heat the oil in a frying pan. Add the garlic, onion, carrot, rosemary, and thyme, and fry for 6 minutes.
4. Add the plant-based minced meat, peas, and tomato paste, and fry for 1 min.
5. Add the tomatoes, red wine, and 75ml stock. Simmer gently for about 10 minutes, until most of the moisture has evaporated.
6. Season with salt and pepper.
7. Put the mixture in an oven dish, and spread the mashed potatoes over the top.
8. Sprinkle with the vegan cheese, then place the dish in the center of the oven. Bake for about 25 minutes until golden brown.



## MAIN COURSES

# Paella with bell peppers, beans, and peas

10 SERVINGS

<b>300 g</b> spanish onion	<b>10 g</b> saffron threads	<b>5 g</b> ground cloves
<b>20 g</b> fresh garlic	<b>5</b> cinnamon sticks	<b>20 g</b> rosemary sprigs
<b>750 g</b> red bell pepper	<b>2.5 l</b> vegetable broth	<b>5 g</b> chilli powder
<b>75 ml</b> olive oil	<b>500 g</b> green beans (fresh or frozen)	<b>70 g</b> herb salt
<b>1000 g</b> basmati rice	<b>500 g</b> peas (fresh or frozen)	Black olives for garnishing
<b>375 ml</b> white wine, alternatively vegetable stock	<b>25 g</b> sweet paprika powder	Lemon for garnishing
		Parsley for garnishing



## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Peel and chop the onion and the garlic cloves. Wash, deseed, and chop the peppers.
2. Heat the olive oil in a heavy frying pan and sauté the chopped ingredients on a medium heat for 2-3 minutes. Then stir in the rice (don't wash it beforehand, otherwise it will become soft and sticky too quickly) and sauté it as well. Deglaze with white wine.
3. Using a wooden spoon, stir in the saffron threads and the cinnamon sticks. Deglaze with the vegetable stock and let everything simmer for 10-15 minutes on a low heat.
4. Clean and chop the beans. Stir them into the mixture, along with the peas, and simmer for another 10-15 minutes. Stir in the paprika powder, clove powder, and rosemary. Season to taste with chilli and herb salt.
5. Before serving, garnish the paella with the black olives, lemon slices, and parsley.



## DESSERTS

# Chia chocolate pudding with strawberry ragout

10 SERVINGS

**For the chia  
chocolate pudding**

1 l almond milk, alternatively  
soya or oat milk

200 g chia seeds

100 g cocoa powder

40 ml agave or maple syrup

2 g cinnamon  
60 ml espresso  
2 g salt

**For the strawberry ragout**

625 g strawberries

10 ml agave syrup

5 ml balsamic vinegar  
fresh ground colourful pepper

**To serve**

10 g almond slivers

mint leaves



## INSTRUCTIONS

**FOR THE CHIA CHOCOLATE PUDDING**

Mix all ingredients in a bowl and season to taste. Pour into glasses and chill, preferably overnight.

**FOR THE STRAWBERRY RAGOUT**

Clean the strawberries and cut into small slices or cubes. Mix with the rest of the ingredients and season to taste.

**TO SERVE**

Pour the strawberry ragout over the chia chocolate pudding, decorate with mint and almonds, and serve.



## DESSERTS

# Fruit salad with soya yoghurt

10 SERVINGS

**1 kg** unsweetened plant-based yogurt e.g. unsweetened soya or oat yogurt  
**25 ml** agave syrup, optional

**500 g** strawberries, fresh or frozen  
**500 g** blueberries, fresh or frozen  
**500 g** banana



## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Wash and cut the bananas. Put them in a bowl together with the rest of the fruits, and mix well.
2. If necessary, mix the soya yogurt with the agave syrup. Serve the fruit salad with the yogurt.



## DESSERTS

# Candied ginger pears

10 SERVINGS

**330 g** ground almonds  
**30 ml** rice syrup  
**10 large** pears, halved and deseeded  
**1 l** pear juice or apple juice  
**15 ml** pear juice, cold  
**15 ml** ginger juice

**3 g** salt  
**15 g** kudzu powder or another plant-based thickening agent  
**15 ml** lemon juice  
**15 g** lemon zest  
**65 ml** maple syrup, optional



## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat a dry frying pan over medium heat. Add the almonds and roast for 3-5 minutes, stirring constantly, until fragrant and golden-brown. Place in a bowl to cool, then grind the almonds in a food processor or mixer until very fine.
2. Heat up the rice syrup in a small saucepan. Add the ground almonds and stir over a medium heat until the mixture thickens. Set aside.
3. Halve the pears and then scoop out the centres. Place the halved pears in a deep frying pan with the cut side up. Pour the pear or apple juice into the pan, together with the ginger juice and salt. Cover the pan, bring the liquid to the boil, then turn the heat down to medium and cook for 7-10 minutes or until the pears are soft. Place the pear halves on a serving plate, leaving the liquid in the pan. Pack the hollowed-out pear halves with the almond mixture.
4. Stir the dissolved kuzu powder into the liquid, heat for 3-5 minutes, stirring continuously, until the sauce thickens. Remove from the heat and stir in the lemon juice and zest. Pour the finished sauce over the pears and serve. For extra sweetness and colour, pour a teaspoon of maple syrup over each pear.



FOR  
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PLEASE SCAN QR ABOVE

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# ABOUT PROVEG



ProVeg International is a food awareness organisation working to transform the global food system by replacing **50% of animal products globally with plant-based and cultivated foods by 2040.**

ProVeg engages with all relevant stakeholders to create a food system where everyone chooses delicious and healthy food that is good for all humans, animals, and our planet.

ProVeg has received the United Nations' Momentum for Change Award and works closely with key UN food and environment agencies. We have observer status with the UNFCCC, the IPCC, and the CBD, special consultative status with ECOSOC, and are accredited for UNEA.

ProVeg creates global impact, with offices in 14 countries across five continents and more than 220 employees.



# Why we are advocating for sustainable catering at large-scale events

## A SHORT HISTORY OF OUR CATERING INTERVENTIONS AT THE COP CLIMATE-CHANGE EVENTS

ProVeg has been actively involved in the UN climate-change conferences since 2017. Above and beyond all of our advocacy work, we have consistently advocated for the event to include more plant-based catering options.

ProVeg first attended in 2017, at COP23 in Bonn, where the conference committed to offering at least 60% vegetarian options. In 2018, ProVeg petitioned the UN to request that the menu at the COP24 event be plant-based.<sup>58</sup> Over the next few years, ProVeg collaborated and partnered with other organisations at the COP events, including Farm Forward, the Center for Biological Diversity, and Brighter Green.<sup>59</sup> In 2021, ProVeg attended catering meetings prior to COP26, and endorsed Food@COP's statement on plant-based catering at the event.<sup>60 61</sup>

In 2022, ProVeg and 50by40, supported by 160+ partner organisations, sent a joint statement letter to the Egyptian presidency of COP27, encouraging the organisers to serve plant-based foods.<sup>62 63</sup> Similarly, ahead of COP28 ProVeg

sent a joint statement letter to the presidency of COP28 advocating for plant-based catering.<sup>64 65</sup> This resulted in substantial menu improvements, including a two-thirds plant-based menu.

In the lead-up to COP29, ProVeg worked directly with the COP29 Catering Lead to increase plant-based offerings and implement strategies to encourage sustainable food choices. Although initial plant-based catering options at COP29 were underwhelming, ProVeg's connection to the catering team allowed us to advocate for ongoing fixes during the conference, which resulted in reformed labeling and more plant-based options.

As a result of these activities and interventions, ProVeg has established itself as a leading voice in a consortium of organisations working to increase plant-based catering options at UN events and institutions. Looking ahead to COP30 in Brazil, ProVeg plans to partner with the COP30 Food Initiative, Na Mesa da COP30, to continue promoting sustainable catering practices, working alongside Brazilian NGOs and government officials.



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## LONG-TERM GOALS FOR THE COP CLIMATE EVENTS

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For COP30, ProVeg wants to ensure food is appealing, affordable and tasty. COP29 sustainable food options were underwhelming in terms of appeal and unlikely to get the average delegate to select the plant-based options.

Ultimately, catering should systematically respond to sustainability criteria, specifically for UN events. Promoting sustainable healthy diets at international climate events like COP could eventually pave the way to more sustainable food and agricultural policies, enabling countries to push for a more ambitious climate agenda and to achieve key climate targets such as the Sustainable Development Goals, considering that six out of 17 have links to agrifood systems, namely SDG 2 on Zero Hunger, SDG 3 on Good Health and Well-being, SDG 12 on Responsible

Consumption and Production, SDG 13 on Climate Action, SDG 14 and 15 on Life Below Water and On Land. The importance of a diversified diet to achieving Zero Hunger (SDG 2) has been recently acknowledged by the official adoption of a new indicator on Minimum Dietary Diversity,<sup>66</sup> showing how not only we need to provide access to food, but also that food needs to be nutritious and varied.

Taking the lead in showing how catering can be more sustainable, diverse and nutritionally complete in international events gives countries the opportunity to replicate best practices at the national level, supporting the diffusion of sustainable public procurement policies, an indicator for the achievement of more sustainable consumption and production patterns (SDG12).<sup>67</sup>

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A catering guide for  
large-scale events

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