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Eat healthier and save the Earth: NYC's food policy will help you and the environment

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The way we eat impacts everything — our physical health, our mental health, our way of life. And it impacts our planet, too. For too long, food has been left out of the conversation around combating climate change, even though it is a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. Today, Oct. 16, on World Food Day, we are highlighting how New York City is charting a path forward to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by changing the way we eat.

The Adams administration took the bold step to center food in our climate plan, PlaNYC: Getting Sustainability Done. Through the plan, Mayor Adams committed to cutting down food-based emissions by 33% by 2030 and challenged our private sector partners to cut their food emissions by 25%. And for the first time in the city's history, New York also launched an Integrated Citywide Greenhouse Gas Inventory, giving us comprehensive insight into how everything, from buildings to transportation to our food choices, has an impact on our emissions.

All the data shows we cannot make real progress on battling climate change without first confronting the reality of how food impacts our planet. Food is the third biggest source of our city's emissions — right after buildings and transportation. Fully a fifth of New York City's greenhouse gas emissions come from household food consumption, including meat, poultry, fish, eggs, and the meals we have when eat out. But by eating more low-carbon food, like fruits, vegetables, grains, and legumes, we can make a dent in the city's overall emissions.

And we know that there's a long running misconception that eating healthy means you must be miserable and eat bad tasting food. That could not be further from the truth.

With a food first approach, build up your muscle without buying expensive supplements. In this video, learn about the 11 best muscle building foods. Featuring everything from delicious fish and creamy yogurt to fresh eggs and sweet chocolate milk, these foods are a great strengthening alternative to protein powder. Watch the video to learn more about how to take advantage of your post-workout recovery time.

From our hospitals to our schools, we are reimagining how healthy eating should look, feel, and taste — all while protecting our planet. Our pioneering plant-based default meal program including menu selections such as red curry vegetables with roasted tofu at NYC Health + Hospitals is on track to serve 850,000 plant-based meals this year, cutting carbon emissions by 36%. Data from early phases of this program revealed an impressive 95% acceptance and 90% satisfaction rate among patients, meaning we're serving healthier food that is delicious.

Our public schools also now serve plant-based options and plant-powered Fridays to expose our children to healthy eating from a young age. We are also bringing world-renowned chefs, like Rachael Ray, to our public schools through our Wellness in Schools program to train Department of Education cooks to make culturally appropriate plant-based meals.

And we are encouraging our children to eat healthier beyond school settings — in June, we released a roadmap to improving food education in the public schools. The roadmap identifies ways to teach students about healthy eating, improve access to healthy foods, and empower members of school communities to be wellness ambassadors. Through this effort, we are creating a culture shift that normalizes and accepts healthy plant-based meals for children.

The city is embedding its climate-minded food practices throughout every part of government. Last year, the mayor updated the city's food standards, which translate the latest research on health and nutrition into guidelines for food served by the city, aligning public health and climate goals.

Additionally, the administration is incorporating the Good Food Purchasing (GFP) values in its food procurement. The GFP Program encourages large institutions to use their buying power to support five core values: local economies, environmental sustainability, valued workforce, animal welfare, and

nutrition. Under the Mayor's Office of Food Policy, we are integrating these values into agency food spending, which will ensure that city funds spent on food support individual, community, and planetary health.

And our emphasis on plant-based foods is not only less carbon-intensive, but also less water-intensive, since foods like fruits and vegetables require less water to harvest. Going plant-based can lead to an approximately 50% reduction in water use. As New York builds a more robust food system that uses less water, we're tackling climate change in ways that transcend carbon reduction.

New York is a leader when it comes to combating climate change, because we are using every option on the menu in our fight – and that includes changing our menus, too. Whether it is the cafeterias where our children eat or a patient recovering at a public hospital, this administration is looking at every possible opportunity to introduce healthy, environmentally conscious meals to New Yorkers.

Together, as one city, we can make the everyday small choices that have a big impact in the fight against climate change — starting with what we put in our body every day.