

P-05-865 Guarantee fully plant-based options on every public sector menu to protect the rights of vegans and for our health, the environment and animals, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 28.06.19

Response to Kirsty Williams AC/AM & Vaughan Gething AC/AM letter dated 17 June 2019 & Lesley Griffiths letter dated 11 June 2019, for consideration by Welsh Petition Committee at meeting 9 July 2019

We note the content of the joint letter from the Minister of Education and Minister for Health and Social Service, which highlights the existing guidelines regarding the provision of vegan food in schools and hospitals. We are pleased to hear that there will be a refresh of the all-Wales Nutrition and Catering Standards to include vegetarian and vegan options in hospitals, but feel that there is progress yet to be made, for the following reasons:

Climate Emergency

In noting the content of the letter from the Minister of Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs, it is evident that the Welsh government are committed to take tough but necessary decisions in order to tackle the climate crisis – with this being reflected in other sectors, such as the decision of scrapping the proposed M4 relief road around Newport. The Welsh Government have officially declared a Climate Emergency and yet, the Ministers fail to acknowledge the wider benefits to society that offering vegan food on standard public sector menus would have for the environment and public health:

- Plant-based diets are better for the environment and can reduce an individual's food-related carbon emissions by up to 50%.
- Researchers at Oxford University have concluded that eating a plant-based diet could be the single biggest way to reduce an individual's environmental impact on the planet.

It is therefore clear, that our ask falls within the remit of the Climate Emergency declaration and would play a vital role in ensuring that the climate emergency is tackled effectively. The Ministers' have already indicated in their letter that this change is possible and would be easy to implement. Mandating a vegan option as standard would therefore, speed up the existing shift and provide consistency to what is already occurring in Wales.

Government Intervention

Chatham House research has stated that the public want government intervention on climate change issues¹, and yet the Minister for Environment, Energy & Rural Affairs believes that vegan options should be driven by consumer demand. It should therefore be noted, that the UK vegan population continues to soar, having doubled twice in the last four years, as people become further aware of the benefits of a plant-based diet. The private sector has already responded to this, with a boom in supply for vegan options in restaurants, pubs, supermarkets and other shops. The public sector however, has been slower to respond. Following the Climate Emergency declaration, legislating to guarantee plant-based options on all public sector menus, would support the public demand for government intervention and encourage sustainable diets in the wider population.

In 2017, Portugal became the first country in the world to implement a law compelling all public sector institutions to offer a vegan meal on their standard menus without people having to make a special request. California has also passed legislation in September 2018, guaranteeing hospital patients and prisoners a healthy plant-based option at every meal. California's economy is the 5th biggest in the world (behind USA, China, Japan & Germany), with a population of just under 40 million people.

It seems likely that more and more nations and states will begin to adopt this approach of guaranteeing plant-based food in the public sector, in the next coming years, and the most recent CCC report asserts that the UK should follow². Wales has the opportunity to lead the way in the UK, in terms of taking meaningful action to address climate change, as well as protecting the ever-growing number of vegans. These issues are of paramount importance, and it is imperative to take appropriate action now

Vegan Rights

Our petition asks for a plant-based option to be made mandatory on every standard public sector menu. In practice, this would mean that there would be a plant-based option in every school, hospital, prison, council, care home and any other state or local authority-run institution menu in Wales, every day. This would be available to everyone, without the need to make a special request. This differs from the current situation that's been outlined in the Ministers' response, where vegans, in theory, can only be catered for by special request.

This indicates an issue with the rights of vegans – in spite of the Ministers' assertions that vegans can be catered for by state/local authority institutions, in practice, this is often not the case. Vegans are often told they cannot be provided for or are offered very limited options, such as plain toast, a single piece of fruit or a packet of crisps,

¹ <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/changing-climate-changing-diets>

² <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/net-zero-technical-report/>

which are not a nutritious meal, and do not meet the standards in the *Healthy Eating in Maintained Schools* statutory guidance. Offering a plant-based meal as standard on all public sector menus ensures that the growing number of vegans are catered for and are not discriminated against.