Friends of the Earth
Climate-Friendly Food
For Healthy Kids and a Healthy Planet

Climate-Friendly School Food: Discussion Qs

This document is a supplemental resource for the Climate-Friendly School Food Presentation, with sample discussion questions and guiding answers to help guide classroom conversations around the importance of climate-friendly school food and inspire students to take action.

- Audience: high school students
- Objective: for students to learn about climate-friendly school food (what it is and why it is important), be inspired to take climate action and empowered with the necessary tools and resources to get involved in a climate-friendly school food campaign.

Discussion Questions

1. How do you define "climate-friendly food"?
2. Do you think that climate-friendly school food is important? Why or why not?
3. What do you think are the most impactful solutions to climate change?
4. After the materials we discussed today, what do you want to learn more about?
5. Give an example of a time that you witnessed injustice. How did it shape or alter your worldview?
6. How has your thinking about global warming changed after today's presentation?
7. How has your knowledge of food shaped your diet/personal eating habits, if at all?
8. What do you think could be changed to improve the quality and health of school food?
9. What is your ideal school food environment? What foods would be on the menu, what would the cafeteria look like?
10. What is one action item you are going to take away from today's presentation and discussion?
11. Are you interested in asking the food service team for more plant-based options or starting a climate-friendly food campaign at your school district?

Guiding Responses

Climate-Friendly School Food:

- "Climate-friendly food" can be defined as:
    - Foods with low carbon and water footprints (plant-based and plant-forward meals).
    - Foods that are produced using organic farming practices that sequester carbon in the soil and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
    - Implementation of waste reduction strategies to reduce food waste, food packaging waste, and support energy and water savings.
- Climate-friendly *school* food service achieves a lower carbon and water footprint by regularly offering healthy, plant-forward and plant-based menu options. It also cuts emissions by sourcing food from organic and regenerative farms; reducing food and packaging waste; and implementing energy and water saving measures in the cafeteria.
- Plant-based foods are 100% sourced from plants and contain no animal products (e.g., beans, lentils, soy products, whole grains, nuts, seeds, fruits and vegetables).

- Plant-forward foods swap out some of the meat and cheese for plant-based foods, resulting in plant-rich, lower-meat or lower-cheese recipes (e.g., bean and turkey chili, mushroom-beef burgers, bean cheese burrito).

Importance of Climate-Friendly Food:

- The food and agriculture sector accounts for between 21 and 37% of global greenhouse gas emissions, and research has shown that we cannot meet the Paris Accord targets without shifting our diets toward more low-carbon foods. Animal-based foods tend to be more carbon-intensive than plant-based foods because of the high resource requirements for raising animals, including water and animal feed.
- With 30 million children served lunch daily, the National School Lunch Program represents a crucial opportunity to mitigate food-related greenhouse emissions and environmental impacts, while also improving student health.
- Even small changes can make a huge difference! For example, if every public school swapped out a beef burger for a veggie burger just once a month, it would save 1.4 billion pounds of CO2-eq a year.
- Right now, very few school districts are offering plant-based meals, despite growing demand from students. Whether for health, environmental, philosophical, religious, cultural or other reasons, students and their families deserve access to food that aligns with their needs.
- Most people in the world cannot process lactose. The National Institutes of Health estimates that 95% of Asians, 60 to 80% of African Americans and Ashkenazi Jews, 80 to 100% of American Indians, and 50 to 80% of Hispanics are unable to process lactose. Especially as our student population becomes increasingly racially and ethnically diverse, schools must be equipped to accommodate their needs by providing sufficient non-dairy options.
- Expanding healthy plant-based menu options is also an important way to advance racial equity in schools. Due to a long legacy of policies that perpetuate economic and racial inequities, Black, Hispanic, Indigenous, and other students of color disproportionately rely on school meals as a primary source of nutrition, so improving the quality of school meals is a crucial point of intervention to mitigate racial health disparities, which can start early in life.
- Healthy diets can boost academic performance and help address educational inequities.

Action Items to Take:

- Choose plant-based options at school and/or at home!
- Reduce your meat and dairy intake.
- Ask for more plant-based and plant-forward menu options at school.
- Talk to your peers about the importance of diet and the impact on climate.
- Find a group of like-minded peers and start a climate-friendly school food campaign at your school! Visit https://foe.org/school-food for more information and email climatefriendlyfood@foe.org for 1-on-1 support!