Cost benefits of serving more plant-based meals

The cost of meat is increasing and is set to keep increasing. Prices for ground beef hit a record of over $6 a pound in mid-2025, over 35% higher than in 2020, and wholesale beef prices are likely to rise further as cattle supplies dwindle and production becomes more expensive. Meanwhile, changing menus to include more plant-based options is a high impact solution that can lower food expenses. Whole foods like legumes are not only more economical, but have a longer shelf life and are also more price stable than conventional animal products. Unlike more capital-intensive sustainability upgrades, such as installing low flow toilets, which can take years to pay off, plant-based menu swaps can start saving your dining operations money from day one.

Real world cost savings success stories

- St. Joseph Health System reported that "Vegetarian entrees cost about **50% less** than meat entrees." The hospital projects saving $5,000 a year by serving more meat-free meals.
- A medium-sized university serving about 10,000 students could save around **$650,000 per year** on food procurement by switching to a fully plant based catering model, because plant-based meals cost roughly 30% less than meat-based ones.
- Cherry Creek School District saved nearly **$25,000 annually** by switching its quick bread recipes to be egg and dairy free, eliminating costly egg ingredients while making baked goods accessible to all students, including those with allergies.
- Oakland Unified School District replaced portions of its meat, poultry, and cheese with plant-based alternatives, resulting in a 1% reduction in cost per meal, totaling over **$40,000 in savings** across two academic years. This was paired with a 14% drop in carbon footprint and 42 million gallons of water saved.

The hidden costs of animal products

The cost consumers pay does not reflect upon the true cost of animal products - these costs are externalized to the environment, human and public health, and the welfare of farm animals.

Health

High consumption of red and processed meats is linked to increased risks of type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and mortality. Overuse of antibiotics in livestock, accounting for approximately 70% of global consumption, contributes significantly to the rise of antimicrobial resistance (AMR), posing a serious threat to human health.

Environment

Animal agriculture is a major contributor to environmental damage, driving deforestation, greenhouse gas emissions, and water pollution due to waste and resource-intensive practices.

Animals

The animal agriculture industry prioritizes profit over welfare, subjecting farmed animals to overcrowded, inhumane conditions, routine mutilations, and severe physical and psychological stress.

For more information, visit *forwardfood.org*

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