



Humane
World for
Animals™

Plant-Powered Retail Toolkit

**Thank you for downloading this
Forward Food Toolkit!**

If you are not already familiar with our work, Forward Food is a not-for-profit program of Humane World for Animals, launched in 2017. We are dedicated to building a food system centered on plant-based foods, benefiting animals, the planet, and public health.

This toolkit is one of several free-of-charge resources that we offer to food service professionals. We hope it provides inspiration and supports your efforts to expand plant-based offerings and uptake within your retail environment!

If you have any questions or would like additional support, our team would be pleased to connect. Thank you for being part of our mission and the growing movement to build a better food system.

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Part 1: The Case for Plant-Based

About Forward Food

Forward Food provides free-of-charge support and resources to the food and food service industries to help them successfully increase plant-based food consumption. We provide training, recipes, marketing support, educational sessions and more to help operations be part of the movement to build a better food system.

In exchange for our support, we ask operations to sign onto the **Forward Food pledge**, a meaningful commitment to purchasing or serving more plant-based foods. You can learn more and sign onto the pledge [here](#).



“*Absolutely recommend this training to anyone interested in incorporating more plant-based meals into their operation. It was **informative**, offered a hugely generous range of **recipes**, and lots of **fun**!*”

— Testimonial from Forward Food training participant

Our Program in Action



Our Work

Since 2017, over 100 food service operations across Canada have signed the Forward Food pledge, committing to making their menus or food purchasing more plant-based.

These operations include post-secondary institutions, municipal and federal government departments, healthcare institutions, charitable sector food programs, food service management companies, offices and more. Together, these organizations serve over 30 million meals each year!

Check out some of our recent collaborations:

- Forward Food Empowers Ottawa’s Charitable Food Sector to Embrace Plant-Rich Menus
- York University commits to increasing plant-based menus in collaboration with Forward Food
- Forward Food program trains chefs working for the Government of Canada

Part 1: The Case for Plant-Based

Defining Plant-Based

Plant-Based:

A food item or dish made entirely from plant-derived ingredients, including vegetables, grains, nuts, seeds, legumes, and fruits, with no animal products (meat, dairy, honey, eggs, fish, etc.), including animal-derived additives such as dyes or pigments, or ingredients tested on animals. Also known as 'vegan'.

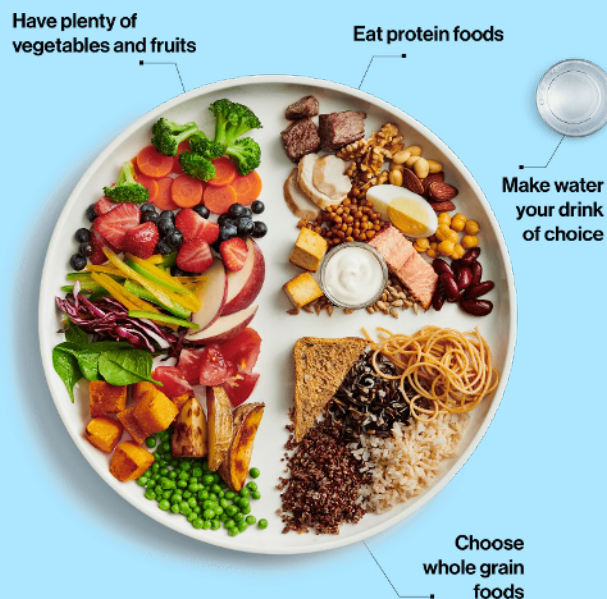
Plant-Forward:

A food item or dish that prioritizes plants without fully eliminating animal-derived products (meat, dairy, eggs, fish, honey, etc.). For example, a meatloaf made with 75% mushrooms and lentils or a plant-based bowl garnished with a small amount of animal protein.



Did you know...

Plant-based and plant-forward dishes align well with Canada's evidence-based Food Guide, which recommends that we eat plenty of vegetables and fruits, whole grains and choose protein foods that come from plants more often.



Source: Health Canada



For more information, visit forwardfood.org/canada

Part 1: The Case for Plant-Based

Benefits of Plant-Based Foods

Health

Eating more plant-based foods – especially whole foods – can lower the risk of heart disease, diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure and certain cancers.

Environment

Plant-based diets require far less land, water, and energy than animal agriculture, and they reduce emissions, pollution, deforestation and biodiversity loss.

Cost Savings

An Oxford study found that in high-income countries, adopting plant-rich diets reduced food costs by up to one-third while also providing health and environmental benefits.

Inclusivity

Plant-based meals can accommodate various dietary needs, including vegan, vegetarian, gluten-free, halal and kosher diets, while also avoiding top allergens (such as eggs and dairy).

Compassion

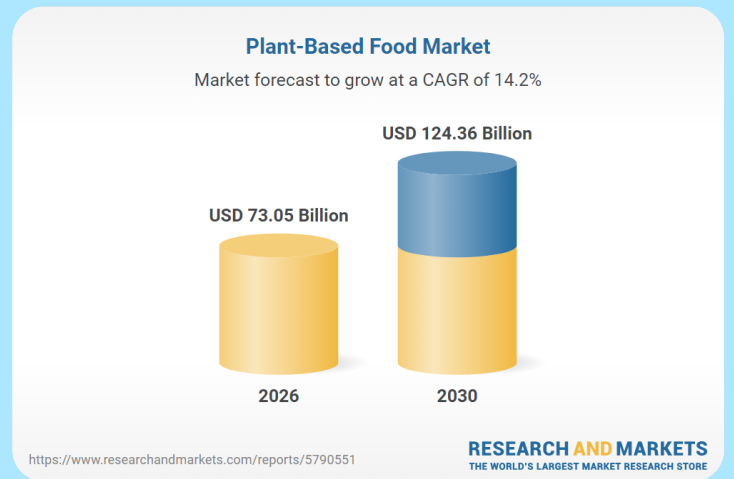
Every single plant-based meal is an act of compassion toward animals, reducing the demand for cruel, industrial farming practices that cause immense unnecessary suffering.



Part 1: The Case for Plant-Based

Market Opportunity

According to [Research and Markets](#), the plant-based food market has grown rapidly in recent years due to increased consumer interest in health and wellness, lactose intolerance and food allergies, and adoption of vegetarian and vegan lifestyles, as well as expanded retail food distribution and availability of diverse plant protein sources. Valued at **\$64.14B USD in 2025**, the market is projected to grow to **\$124.36B USD by 2030**, representing a CAGR of 14.2%.



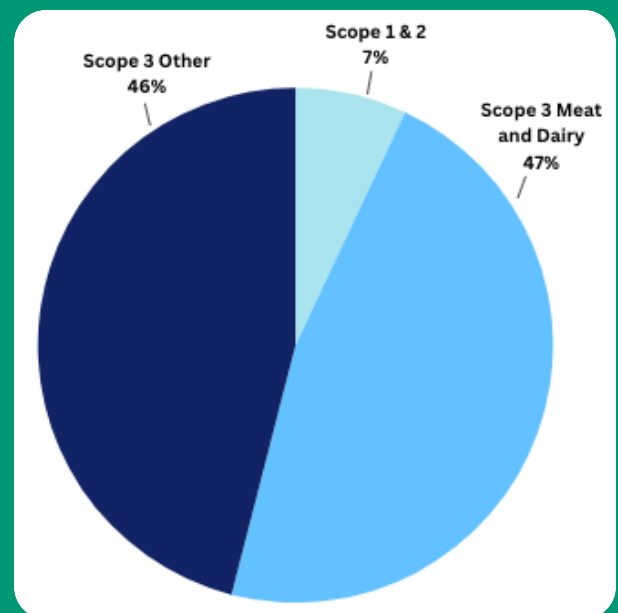
Climate Opportunity

Meat and dairy alone make up almost half of all emissions of a food retailer, according to research out of Germany. A recent analysis considered the most cost-effective pathways for local retailers to achieve their climate targets, focusing on plant-rich food systems, improved agricultural practices, and reduced food loss and waste (for meat and dairy specifically). It concluded that "**promoting a plant-rich food system offers the most immediate and cost-effective opportunity for emissions reduction.**"

As summarized by a [media outlet](#) covering the report, "Rebalancing protein offerings to support plant-based diets can help supermarkets reach their climate goals quickly and inexpensively. ... By far, **the most impactful strategy is for retailers to replace 30% of meat and dairy offerings with plant-based alternatives**, which use less land, water and resources, and can be sourced at a lower cost."

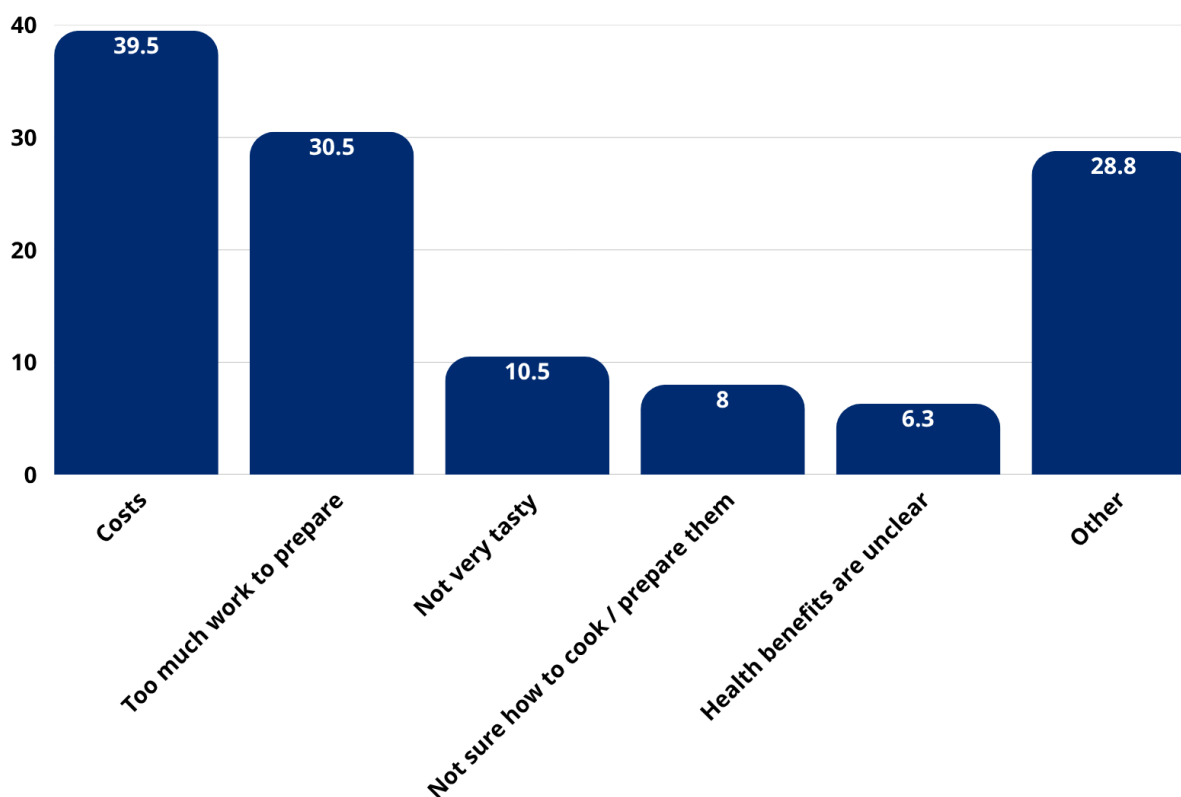
Meat and dairy alone make up almost half of all emissions of a food retailer...

According to an analysis published in 2023 by Quantis and Madre Brava.



Part 2: Best Practices for Promoting Plants

Barriers to fruits and vegetables purchases (Dalhousie University, 2021)



Despite the well-documented benefits of eating more plant-based foods, several **barriers persist**. **Price and appeal are two of the biggest obstacles to increased plant-based food consumption, followed by habit and convenience.** This is unsurprising given the substantial price gap that frequently exists between plant-based meats and their animal-based counterparts.

Similar barriers apply to fruit and vegetable consumption. Two years after the release of Canada's latest Food Guide, **research** from Dalhousie University demonstrated that only 29.3% of Canadians were purchasing enough produce to match the recommended daily intake.

We can learn lessons from Europe, where retail sales volumes of plant-based foods are growing in France, Germany, Italy and Spain. Cheaper private-label products are driving much of the increase, but in some categories, relatively expensive branded products are boosting sales. Regardless, to reduce barriers to consumption, achieving price and taste parity will be key.

There are several strategies that retailers can employ to increase sales of plant-based foods, from meat and dairy alternatives to legumes, whole grains fruits and vegetables. These strategies are complementary and intended to be implemented together for best results.

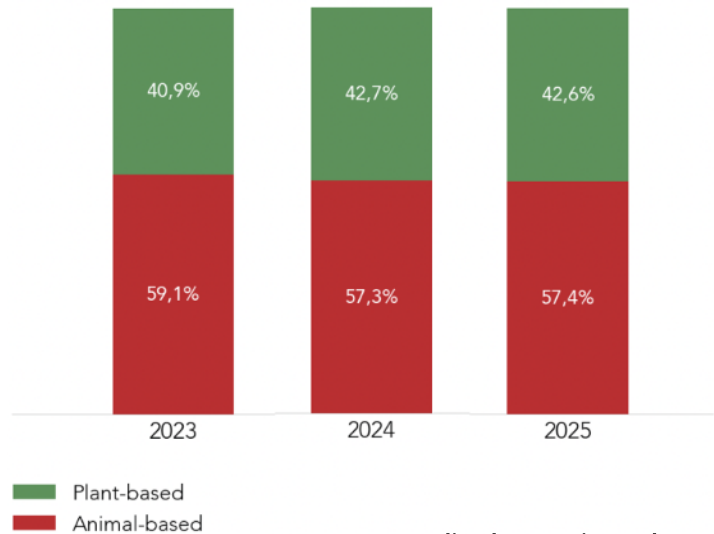
Part 2: Best Practices for Promoting Plants

Strategy 1: Protein Targets

Across Europe and beyond, **retailers are setting sustainability targets to shift their sales to be predominantly from plant-based proteins**. For example, Lidl announced new sustainability targets across its 31 international markets, committing to increasing its proportion of plant-based foods sold by 20% by 2030 (with a baseline of 2023).

Meat and dairy production make up at least half of the retailer's scope 3 emissions, and the company wants to reduce its scope 3 emissions by 35%.

Protein split of retailers for the years 2023, 2024 and 2025



Credit: The Protein Tracker

This strategy is best exemplified in the Netherlands, where all major supermarkets publicly report the proportion of plant-based proteins they sell, as part of a national strategy to better balance protein consumption. Companies are using **The Protein Tracker**, a “universal method that helps supermarkets and food service companies achieve a better balance between plant-based and animal proteins.” The tracker was developed by a coalition of food-system advocacy groups and retailers.”

Today, 85% of retailers in the Netherlands are using the tool to **drive sales of plant-based food towards a 60% share by 2030**. Setting a concrete target and measuring the share of animal and plant-based proteins currently purchased and sold are important first steps to being able to actively drive change, ultimately helping consumers make more plant-based choices.

REWE Group (Germany)

REWE Group, one of Europe's largest trading companies, is one of many businesses to have adopted a sustainable protein strategy. Driven by ambitious climate goals, their strategy includes veganizing many of their existing recipes and ingredients, using clear labeling and an attractive product range to promote accessible and conscious eating, and supporting food tech startups that can meet their future purchasing needs. They have also set a goal of increasing the proportion of plant-based products they purchase to 60 percent by 2035.

Part 2: Best Practices for Promoting Plants

Strategy 2: Product Ranges

Once your organization has determined its baseline and set an ambitious yet achievable goal for increasing the proportion of your sales that come from plant-based foods, the next most important strategy is to **diversify offerings to include a wide range of quality products**. This should cover all categories – meat, fish, milk, cheese, other dairy, ready meals, baked goods, snacks, sauces and dips – and focus on products that are delicious and functional.



Increasing uptake of plant-based products begins with offering a robust range of high-quality options that will meet diverse consumer needs. In fact, an **analysis** of sales data from over 20,000 Italian grocery stores between 2020 and 2023 confirmed that having more plant-based options on the shelf consistently increased their market share, due to the fact that shoppers generally seek variety from retailers. The same analysis noted that retailers with more complete and distinctive assortments obtain a competitive advantage.

In Canada, **research** suggests that significantly more shelf space is allocated to animal-based protein than plant-based protein in stores. This in turn leads shoppers to perceive a lack of variety among plant-based proteins, “especially for products like tofu and packaged grains and legumes”, hindering sales.

Aldi SÜD (Germany)

ALDI SÜD has worked to significantly expand its plant-based range in recent years, and now offers over 1,400 vegan-labelled products. This is more than double the number that were available in 2021. The discounter has also been started to publish the plant-based share of its food range. As of **September 2025**, 56.4% of the range is plant-based, while 43.6% is animal-based.



Credit: Aldi SÜD

Part 2: Best Practices for Promoting Plants

Strategy 3: Placement and Positioning

For consumers to choose plant-based options more often, those options must be easy to find. The Plant-Based Foods Association (PBFA) – the leading U.S. trade group representing hundreds of plant-based food companies – notes that plant-based foods are often difficult to find due to “inconsistent merchandising and lack of clear signage”.

Research shows that consumers expect to find plant-based products in the same refrigerated section as their meat, dairy or egg counterparts, but that they should be grouped separately.



Indeed, as a Canadian study revealed: "several consumers indicated that plant-based sources of protein, especially plant-based meat analogues, were often not in the sections that they expected them to be and had difficulty finding these products in new shopping environments."

Best practice is to therefore integrate plant-based products with their conventional counterparts, making them consistently easy to locate. **We recommend that retailers:**

- Ensure consistent destinations and integration across categories and across banners.
- Have clear overhead and shelf signage to support in-store navigation.
- Include sufficient variety within sets, catering to consumers' variety-seeking behaviours.

Kroger (U.S.) and Lidl (Netherlands)

A [case study](#) from Kroger reveals how impactful this small shift can be: in a 12-week pilot, 60 test stores in Colorado, Indiana and Illinois trialed integrating plant-based meats in to the conventional meat department. These stores witnesses a 23% increase in total plant-based meat sales compared to control stores, where no changes were made.

In addition, a [pilot study](#) conducted by Lidl Netherlands, with Wageningen University and the World Resources Institute (WRI), confirmed that placing meat alternatives next to conventional meat significantly boosts sales. The study took place in 70 stores over a six-month period. Sales of meat alternatives increased by 7% during this time and meat sales also fell slightly.

Part 2: Best Practices for Promoting Plants

Strategy 3: Placement and Positioning

Research shows that **nudges that make healthy options more visible, accessible, or intuitively appealing tend to yield better outcomes**. To better promote more sustainable, healthy and compassionate options, dedicate premium store space to plant-based foods – making them more visible and signaling their importance.

In Canada, shoppers have noticed that the meat, seafood and dairy sections are more prominent within shopping environments, whereas plant-based products are perceived to be relatively “hidden”. This translates into reduced consumption; as The Good Food Institute remarked at Plant Based World Expo North America in December 2025:

“Among consumers who have eaten plant-based meat, but not in the past year, 23% indicated that the reason [they haven’t eaten it] is that they never think about it.”

People want to eat more plants, but many revert to familiar foods when shopping, partially because of subtle cues nudging them toward the status quo. With shoppers often short on time, what is familiar and easy usually wins. Plant-based options need to be an obvious and reliable choice. Over time and with repeat exposure, they also become more familiar.

Recommendation for retailers:

- Make plant-rich products or dishes the default, and give them prime placement (eye-level, endcaps, near registers, store perimeter, etc.)
- Place plant-forward options first wherever it makes sense (at deli counters, in self-serve food displays, etc.).
- Leverage strategic adjacencies (grouping ingredients for recipes together or grouping items that pair well together, such as taco shells with plant-based ground meat)



Part 2: Best Practices for Promoting Plants

Strategy 4: Price-Based Promotions

It's well established that taste and price are major factors in consumer decisions at the point of purchase. This is especially true for plant-based meat, with taste and price often cited as the leading barriers to consumption and repeat purchases.

Retailers can use price-based promotions (and private label opportunities) as a key marketing lever to close the price gap, helping address the cost barrier.



An [analysis](#) of Canadian grocery stores demonstrated that there are more price-based promotions for animal-based protein than for plant-based protein. It notes: "There were significantly more sales per square foot of shelf space within supermarkets for animal-based protein products than plant-based protein products. This was particularly true for the higher-end conventional retailers who appear to use sales as a common marketing strategy."

The same paper also observed: "There was also a large consensus that meat and dairy had the greatest number of sales and that they were "good" sales, for instance being discounted by as much as 50%. When it comes to plant-based protein, consumers perceived product sales as rarely occurring, and that when they do occur they only offered a small discount."

Lidl (Germany)

German supermarket Lidl is leveling the playing field for plant-based foods by [price-matching](#) its Vemondo vegan products to their animal-based equivalents. In addition to lowering prices, Lidl is placing Vemondo products near their animal-derived counterparts in its over 3,250 German stores, making it easier for customers to find and compare plant-based options.

Jumbo (Netherlands)

Jumbo is the second-largest retailer in the Netherlands and [made headlines](#) in 2024 for ending discounts on fresh animal meat (beef, pork and chicken). This is part of the company's efforts to flip its current protein split sales from 60% animal/40% plant to 60% plant/40% animal by 2030.

Part 2: Best Practices for Promoting Plants

Strategy 5: Signage and Labeling

Finally, strategies for promoting plant-based foods should include robust multi-channel marketing efforts. In the words of the Plant-Based Foods Association:

“The mission is clear: to normalize plant-based as a delicious, accessible, and versatile choice for every household. Thoughtful storytelling, clear messaging, and effective marketing programs will create sustainable, long-term growth for the plant-based category.”

However, in-store marketing efforts for plant-based foods are significantly under-utilized at present. We encourage retailers to experiment with these in-store marketing levers:

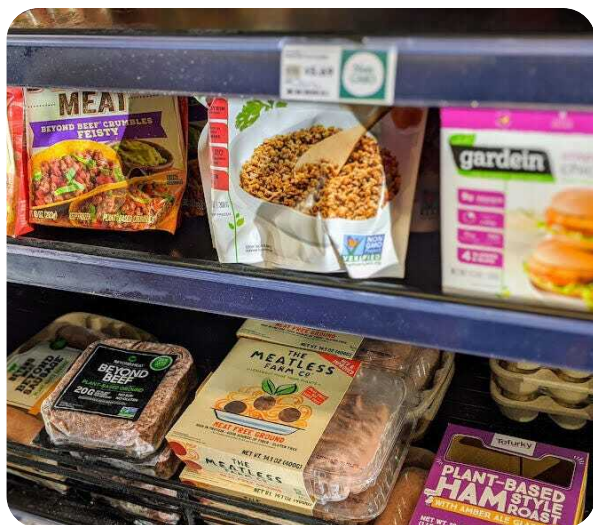


- **Shelf tags** (e.g., “New” or “Plant-based”)
- **Section labels with broad appeal** (e.g., “Plant Proteins” rather than “Vegan”)
- **Recipe cards or cross-promotions** (coupled with strategic adjacencies)
- **Educational signs** (e.g., “Heart-healthy option” or “This item has a low environmental impact” or “Half Your Plate” or “Get Your 5 a Day”)
- **Private label products with eye-catching packaging** that position products as “fun,” “healthy,” or “environmentally sustainable”
- **Appealing language on private label products or in-store prepared foods**, like “crispy”, “spicy”, “caramelized”, “homestyle”, “glazed”, or “creamy”
- **Offering samples of new products** to encourage shoppers to try something new, without risk (e.g., sampling stations)
- **Carbon impact labels** in-store or online, flagging plant-based options as lower-emission
- **Loyalty programs** that incorporate and reward plant-based purchases
- **Digital marketing**, such as digital in-store signage, apps that recommend or incentivize plant-based purchases, and social media

Part 2: Best Practices for Promoting Plants

Strategy 5: Signage and Labeling

With so many plant-based options available, and different perceptions and barriers to consumption, **leverage differentiated marketing across categories depending on the product and target audience**. For example, highlight protein content and sustainability of plant-based meats; affordability and shelf stability of beans and lentils; health benefits and seasonality of fruit and vegetables.



Across marketing channels, it's also important to use messaging tailored to your audience. The Plant-Based Foods Association recommends marketing with **messaging that highlights product benefits and attributes, normalizing plant-based options as a versatile, mainstream choice**. For example:

For Millennials and Gen Z: Focus on flavour, health, convenience, and sustainability. Examples: "Ready in minutes" or "Better for the planet".

For Gen X and Boomers: Emphasize health benefits and quality, such as: "Promotes heart health", "High in fibre" or "Low in saturated fat".

In a **2024 study** in the United States, researchers examined consumer responses to messages designed to encourage healthy eating. Its findings are consistent with similar research conducted in other food environments (such as **restaurants**):

- "participants perceived messages to be most effective at encouraging the target dietary substitutions when the messages: encouraged specific, achievable dietary changes; linked these dietary changes to clear consequences; included personally relevant content; included statistics; were succinct; and used a positive tone."
- "two message topics (small changes, big benefits, which emphasized how small dietary changes can have large positive health and environmental impacts, and warning, which discussed the negative health and environmental impacts of dietary choices)" were generally perceived to be most effective."

The conclusion: "campaign messages to encourage healthy, sustainable dietary substitutions may be more effective if the messages make the target dietary substitutions seem achievable and use statistics to clearly describe the positive impacts of making these changes."

Part 2: Best Practices for Promoting Plants

Strategy 5: Signage and Labeling

The 2024 study tested messages using these seven themes:

Theme	Message Example
Progress over perfection	Red meat can harm your health and the environment. But you don't have to change all the time to make a difference: swapping beans for beef or pork just one day per week can improve your health and reduce your climate impact.
Small changes, big benefits	Replace just one beef dish per day for a plant-based dish. It can reduce your carbon emissions by about 50%. It can also lower your risk of heart disease by about 20%, and reduce your risk of diabetes and high blood pressure.
Social norms	More than half of adults in Canada are making changes to eat less meat. Choose plant-based dishes instead – they're better for your health and the environment.
Anti-industry	Hundreds of studies show that beef and pork are more harmful to your health and the environment than chicken or beans. But advertisements for red meat are often carefully crafted to portray red meat as healthy and sustainable. Don't be fooled by these ads – choose plant-based proteins instead.
Future generations	A greener and healthier future for us and the generations to come starts on our plates. Protect our planet from climate change and improve your health by eating plant-based dishes instead of meat.
Taste	Plant-based dishes are healthier, more sustainable, and delicious alternatives to meat. They're packed with good sources of protein, fresh vegetables, and flavourful herbs and spices. Explore the satisfying flavours of these sustainable and healthy foods.
Warning	Producing beef creates 6 x more emissions than chicken and 17 x more emissions than plant-based proteins, contributing to climate change. That's not all: eating a portion of beef every day increases your diabetes risk by up to 20% compared to other proteins. Choose plant-based dishes to reduce harms to both the climate and your health.

Part 3: Putting Plans Into Action

Now you're ready to put your plans into action!

You can combine the five strategies outlined in the previous pages to create a comprehensive plan for prioritizing plants within your business. It should begin with assessing your baseline and setting a target for plant-based product sales (especially proteins) and outline concrete steps your company can take to improve the variety of available plant-based options, paired with price incentives and consumer engagement activations.

Veganuary Experiment (UK)

To demonstrate one example of these best practices in action, consider this case study of a major retailer in the UK that conducted a Veganuary experiment over a 4-week period. During this time, they:

- Increased their offerings by developing new plant-based products
- Increased the availability of plant-based products by placing them at eye level and on end caps
- Used colourful promotional materials to draw attention to selected plant-based products
- Nudged consumers toward plant-based products by encouraging plant-based “swaps” in meals
- Developed and offered plant-based recipes, placed in store near selected plant-based products
- Introduced price-based promotions on selected plant-based products (such as mass loyalty card discount for branded products or discounts on own brand products)
- Ensured price parity between own-brand plant-based product and animal products

The result: average weekly unit sales of plant-based products increased 57% during the intervention period, and remained 15% higher post-intervention, compared to pre-intervention!



Part 3: Putting Plans Into Action

Looking for even more creative ideas to accelerate your progress?



Try these strategies:

Reformulating baked goods

- Swap dairy and eggs for simple plant-based alternatives like applesauce, oil, or plant-based milks.
- Cherry Creek School District in Denver, Colorado made the switch across all baked goods with no change in taste or student satisfaction. The results: over \$13,000 in annual savings, about 22,500 kg of CO₂e avoided each year, and more inclusive options for dairy- and egg-free diets, all while keeping familiar favourites like muffins and breads on the menu.

Turn staff into champions

- Engage frontline staff to sample, recommend, and promote plant-based items.
- Their enthusiasm helps build trust and increase uptake.

Support emerging suppliers

- Partner with small, local plant-based brands and help them scale.
- Retail collaborations can bring innovative products to shelves while strengthening local food systems.

Part 3: Putting Plans Into Action

Ready to make a change?

Start with setting a meaningful goal. Sign the Forward Food pledge!

Benefits of setting a goal:

- 1. Creates clarity and focus:** A clear goal turns good intentions into a concrete plan and helps teams understand what they are working toward.
- 2. Sets a measurable target:** Goals make progress visible, whether it is increasing your plant-based offerings, defaulting your meals to plant-based, or reducing animal-based ingredient procurement over time.
- 3. Makes change feel achievable, especially when paired with incremental targets:** A defined goal breaks change into manageable steps, which can help to prevent it from feeling overwhelming or too abstract.
- 4. Builds accountability and momentum:** Having a shared target helps keep plant-based efforts on the radar and encourages follow-through across teams. Monitoring progress towards a shared goal can build excitement.
- 5. Provides something to celebrate:** Reaching a goal creates a clear moment to recognize effort, celebrate success, and build confidence to take the next step. Our team is always happy to share your plant-based wins on our own Forward Food platforms.
- 6. Supports long-term impact:** Achieving even small plant-based goals can lead to lasting improvements in sustainability, food costs, animal welfare and your guests' health over time.



Learn more and sign the pledge

Contact Forward Food for free support:
forwardfoodcanada@humaneworld.org



For more information, visit forwardfood.org/canada