

# Providing Plant-Based Meals in Washington State Schools



## THE OBJECTIVE:

Children in Washington state schools deserve access to healthy, plant-based foods. Pasado's Safe Haven supports legislation that would encourage Washington state schools to provide our students with plant-based meal options that meet USDA Child Nutrition protein standards. This would create more equitable access to healthy food choices while addressing known environmental, climate, and health concerns.

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## EQUITABLE ACCESS TO FOOD

Eating habits begin in early childhood, and unfortunately, many students rely on public school cafeterias as their only guaranteed source of food, which limits their ability to exercise healthy choices and eating habits. Amending existing programs to require school districts to incorporate more plant-based food options, including alternative proteins, would give these students more equitable access to food resources.

## A CLIMATE SOLUTION

Washington state is a national leader in addressing the climate crises, and encouraging access to more plant-based foods helps to advance this priority. Science has proven that plant-based foods greatly reduce environmental impact, producing a fraction of greenhouse gases and minimizing deforestation, water use, and pollution.

## PROMOTES HEALTHY CHOICES

Healthy nutrition during childhood reduces the risk of long-term health problems, including allergies, heart disease, diabetes, obesity, cancer, and other chronic diseases. Plant-based meals are an excellent source of healthy nutrition, and a nutritionally sufficient plant-based meal is energizing and allows students to stay focused in the classroom.

## RESPECTFUL OF RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL PRACTICES

Many religions and cultures have depended on plant-based food sources for centuries. Unfortunately, the food options commonly served in public school cafeterias do not include these individuals and communities. Requiring school districts to incorporate more plant-based food, including alternative proteins, would allow for more culturally appropriate food varieties.

## ADDRESSES SUPPLY CHAIN ISSUES AND STAFFING SHORTAGES

School districts across Washington state have experienced drastic food supply chain issues and staffing shortages due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Encouraging school districts to incorporate more plant-based food, including alternative proteins, would allow schools to supplement their supply chain options. Additionally, plant-based foods are more conducive to being served cold or as "grab-and-go" items, which has become necessary for the many school districts experiencing staffing shortages.

*Please reach out to [amyw@pasadosafehaven.org](mailto:amyw@pasadosafehaven.org) with questions or for more information.*