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Waste and food loss occurs in both meat-based and plant-based foods before consumption due to spoilage and disruptions in the food chain. However, it occurs in approximately 40% of meat products versus 30% of fresh produce.

Meat production requires significant amounts of land plus resources such as water and grain to raise livestock—resources which could more efficiently produce protein-rich plant alternatives. When an equal amount of protein from meat versus plants is compared, plant-based protein requires substantially fewer resources and produces far less pollution.

According to a National Library of Medicine article (Alon Shepon et al), replacing resource-intensive animal-based food products with plant-based foods in the United States alone could feed an additional 350 million people.

Eating plant-based meals is a powerful way to impact health. A plant-based diet high in fiber, rich in vitamins and minerals, low in calories and saturated fat, and free of cholesterol has been shown to improve heart disease and diabetes and lower the risk of developing certain cancers.

Greener by Default's strategy is brilliantly simple: make plant-based foods the default menu item while giving diners the choice to add meat or dairy. Many people think that plant-based meals are not very filling. However, Greener by Default works carefully to ensure entrees include vegetables, legumes and grains—meals that are satisfying and nutritionally balanced with adequate protein.

Institutions which partner with Greener by Default receive guidance in reviewing their current foodservice and developing strategies for offering plant-based dishes as the main entree, with the choice to add meat, dairy or to switch completely to a meat-based meal. By presenting plant-based entrees as the norm, people who might otherwise be intimidated to try a new way of eating are able to experiment, with the security of having familiar foods available.

Greener by Default works closely with each institution, developing an 8-12-week pilot program to create meals designed with an eye toward cultural diversity and the dietary needs of the group being served. The services provided can range from training and support of the foodservice team, recipe and promotional language development, collecting purchasing and sales data, as well as diner satisfaction surveys and staff feedback. At the end of the pilot program, Greener by Default

analyzes the institution's data and offers continued support to expand or permanently implement strategies, if desired.

One of their success stories is NYC Health + Hospitals, which now has permanently implemented the program for their patients' menus. According to statistics available on Greener by Default's website, 60% of the patients chose plant-based meals with a 95% satisfaction score, saving New York City Hospitals \$500,000 annually.

LinkedIn's San Francisco office also joined with Greener by Default, shifting to a 65% plant-based menu in their employee cafeteria as a way to reduce waste and contribute to employee health.

Greener by Default also partners with event and conference planners to bring plant-based meals to their menus. When plant-based meals are offered as the default option, many attendees are willing to step outside of their comfort zone to try something new. By offering plant-based entrees, everyone is able to enjoy their meal, regardless of dietary preferences, allergies or religious constraints. With increasing awareness around issues of sustainability and concern regarding carbon emissions, Greener by Default is able to assist corporations and institutions in calculating the carbon saved by offering plant-based meals as the default option. I reached out to Katie Cantrell to discuss Greener by Default's success. She emphasized that "internal allies" were critical to getting more institutions on board to pilot plant-based menus.

"People have a lot of power to impact the food policies at their school, workplace or events."

To learn more about bringing plant-based options to your organization's menus, check out the information under "Resources" on Greener by Default's website: <https://www.greenerbydefault.com/culinary>.

References:

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