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46TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

AB 558: Plant-Based School Lunches

BILL SUMMARY:

This bill would incentivize healthy, climate-friendly meals in California's public schools by providing an additional reimbursement to schools that serve a plant-based entrée or milk option. The bill provides a reimbursement of up to 20 cents for a plant-based food option and 10 cents for a plant-based milk option for schools serving an increased number of options from a baseline year. This bill proposes to offer grants up to \$100,000 to schools for training, equipment, and technical assistance needed to scale up their healthy, plant-based food offerings. Grants would be prioritized for schools with the highest percentage of students eligible for free or reduced meals.

BACKGROUND:

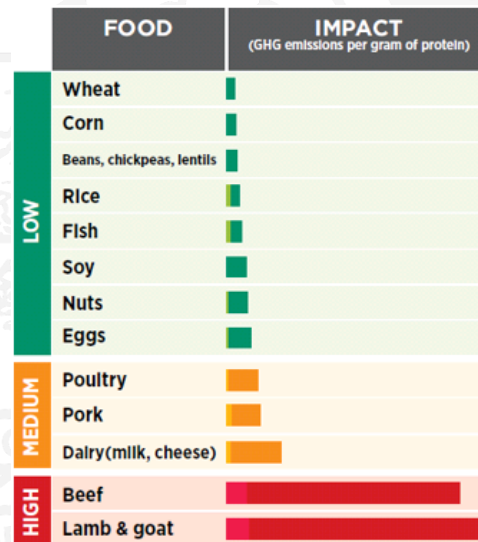
It is clear that implementing a plant-based meal or a milk option in one's diet has obvious benefits. Similarly, there are also environmental problems that can be improved by providing these options. Agriculture (excluding processing) generates 8% of California's greenhouse gas emissions, with livestock production accounting for two-thirds of those emissions and 55% of the state's methane emissions. Animal foods generally have a significantly higher carbon footprint than plant-based foods. This is primarily due to methane emissions from the animal's digestive process and waste management, as well as nitrous oxide emissions from feed production. Methane is a short-lived climate pollutant, up to 86 times more potent a gas than carbon dioxide over a 20-year period.

PROBLEM:

On the scientific front, research shows that we cannot meet the Paris Climate Accord targets without curbing consumption of animal products.

For California to do its part, we must tackle the food served by public schools.

At the same time, Californians are suffering from adverse health effects associated with overconsumption of meat, including diabetes, heart disease, and even cancer. Studies suggest that increasing consumption of plant-based foods has substantial health benefits. It can reduce the risk of diabetes, maintain a healthy weight, and provide protection against cancer and other diseases.



Source: Adapted from World Resources Institute Protein Scorecard. (2016).

SOLUTION:

California can improve student health while reducing greenhouse gas emissions associated with the estimated 540 million school lunches served each year by incentivizing more plant-based school meals.

A pilot analysis of Oakland Unified School District conducted by Friends of the Earth documented a

14% reduction in carbon emissions and a 6% reduction in water use as a result of the district reducing its meat and dairy purchases over the course of two years. Student satisfaction increased by 23%, demonstrating that it is possible to serve meals that are better for student health, better for the climate, and still delicious.

Numerous school districts across the state have also been increasing plant-based offerings but often face cost barriers since animal-based foods and cow's milk are heavily subsidized by the federal government relative to plant-based foods and plant-based milk options.

This bill will enable these school districts to accelerate their shifts to healthy, climate-friendly menus by mitigating costs of healthy, plant-based meals. It will also provide critical support for staff training, student engagement, recipe development, and other technical assistance needed to help schools boost participation rates and successfully serve plant-based foods in all of California's public schools.

California's Fresh Start Pilot Program provided an extra reimbursement to schools to incentivize serving fresh fruits and vegetables. AB 558 replicates this proven successful model to encourage serving more healthy and climate-friendly meals, helping our state achieve its climate goals while simultaneously improving students' health and supporting animal welfare.

SUPPORT:

- PCRM (Co-Sponsor)
- Social Compassion in Legislation (Co-sponsor)
- Friends of the Earth (Co-sponsor)
- FFAC (Co-sponsor)
- CASC (Co-sponsor)

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