# Organize a Plant-based Rotary Event: The Beginning of a New Tradition

**Why is it important for Rotary events to be plant-based or at least plant-rich?**

In 2021, Rotary International recognized “Protecting the Environment " as its seventh area of focus to acknowledge the impact environmental degradation and climate change were having on its humanitarian work around the world. Although several clubs were involved in environmental activities prior to that, this announcement signalled a unity of purpose and elevated this work to the highest level of importance in Rotary.

Our use of fossil fuels has typically been cited as the primary cause of climate change and ecological disruption. Frequently overlooked, however, is the scientific research that has established beyond a doubt that global industrialized animal agriculture is one of the most environmentally destructive sectors on the planet. Even if we stopped all fossil fuel use today, greenhouse gas emissions from industrial agriculture would prevent us from reaching the global reductions needed to avoid the point of no return.

Diets high in animal products - meat, dairy, eggs, fish and seafood - are not only devastating the planet, but also devastating human health by contributing to many common chronic diseases, antibiotic resistance, and zoonotic diseases such as avian flu.

**Why an Event with Plant-based Menus?**

Despite being aware of much of the science about the massive impact animal agriculture has on the planet, many people hesitate to take their first step towards eating a more plant-based diet. One of the most prominent hurdles for that is the fear about the taste of plant based food. It is often presumed that food made with plants is bland, boring and made with just lettuce and spinach! Nothing could be further from the truth, which can be demonstrated at events with delicious plant-based menus.

Events, especially Rotary events, where fellowship is a fundamental element, can be very effective in dispelling this preconceived notion about the taste and quality of plant based foods. Bonding over delicious food that is also great for their own health and the planet can be a powerful way to bring people together towards a climate solution, delicious like no other!

One way to get Rotary members to try a plant-based menu would be to organize an environmental event with a plant-based menu. Like every other Rotary event, having an Organizing Committee always helps.

Here are a few ideas for that:

1. Create an Organizing Committee for your environmental event. Including members from different clubs is a great way to reach out to more people.

2. Decide a date and a theme for the event. The theme could be related to the impact our dietary patterns have on the planet or any other climate issue such as waste management, fossil fuels, fashion industry, etc.
3. Select a venue that has high sustainability standards and commitments or sustainable event certifications. Sustainability standards and certifications are voluntary guidelines used by producers, manufacturers, traders, retailers, and service providers to demonstrate their commitment to good environmental, social, ethical, and food safety practices. Usually such venues are experienced and more receptive to plant-based menus.
4. *Talk to the chef - the most important step!* Let the chef know about what you would like the menu to look and taste like. Ideally all the dishes would be plant-based, delicious and nutritious. You could add other instructions such as:
    a. Use only natural ingredients, non-GMO etc;
    b. Avoid deep frying;
    c. Avoid or minimize use of processed ingredients like plant-based meats. Plant-based meats are often perceived as unhealthy because their ingredients are unfamiliar. Using branded products may be mistaken as a publicity strategy, which can potentially dilute the actual reason behind organizing the event.
    d. To avoid confusion and also to reassure the guests that a plant-based diet can be delicious and nutritious, make sure that each course has a natural plant protein source like tofu, tempeh, edamame, legumes, lentils, etc. This will ensure a higher satiety as well, which is significant.

Take a look at one such event, Rotary's Climate Change Conversations (RC3), organized by a club in Singapore in June 2022. The second edition of RC3 is scheduled for April 2023. Feel free to reach out to Ambaree, who is the Organizing Chairperson of RC3 in Singapore if you have any queries.

**Still not convinced? Here are a few facts about the impact of our current dietary patterns on the planet:**

***Greenhouse Gas Emissions***

- If the livestock sector were to continue with business as usual, this sector alone would account for 49% of the allowed emissions to keep global warming to 1.5C by 2030.
- Estimates of greenhouse gas emissions from the global livestock industry range from 14.5% to 51% (and even higher) of total global emissions.
- Meat and dairy provide just 18% of calories and 37% of protein, despite producing the vast majority – 60% of agriculture's direct greenhouse gas emissions.
- The global livestock industry is responsible for 32% of global methane emissions (compared to 35% from fossil fuels) and at least 53% of global nitrous oxide emissions.
- Methane and nitrous oxide trap 80+ times and 300+ times more heat in our atmosphere than CO2, respectively. These two gasses are responsible for the rapid pace of global warming, and are relatively short-lived in the atmosphere compared to CO2, which can persist for centuries. For example, methane only lasts in the atmosphere for about 12 years.
- Significant shifts to plant-based diets by 2050 could lead to sequestration of CO2 equivalent to 9-16 years of global fossil fuel CO2 emissions.

***Land Use & Biodiversity Loss***

- The global food system is the #1 cause of biodiversity loss, much of it due to the massive scale of producing meat, dairy, eggs, fish and seafood.
- Today, 94% of mammal biomass (excluding humans) is livestock. This means livestock outweigh wild mammals by a factor of 15-to-1.
- Of the 28,000 species evaluated to be threatened with extinction on the IUCN Red List, agriculture and aquaculture is listed as a threat for 24,000 of them.
- The global livestock industry is the largest user of land on earth, using 83% of the world's farmland to graze livestock and grow livestock feed.
- 34% of global crop production goes to feeding livestock. Yet, the livestock industry produces only 18% of the world's calories and 37% of protein.
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- Cattle grazing for beef is the #1 driver of tropical deforestation globally.
- A plant-based diet frees up 76% of agricultural land for wildlife.
- Seafood consumption has doubled in the past 50 years and 94% of ocean fisheries are over-fished or maximally-sustainably fished.

***Inefficiency and Feed Crops***

- For every 100 calories of grain fed to farmed animals, you only get:
    -  40 calories of milk
    -  22 calories of eggs
    - 12 calories of chicken
    - 10 calories of pork
    -  3 calories of beef, which is a brazen wastage of our precious resources

***Ocean Pollution & Water Use***

- 66% of the marine environment is severely altered by human actions and 55% is covered by industrial fishing.
- Nearly 75% of global freshwater resources are now devoted to crop or livestock production.
- Run-off of contaminants like manure from Concentrated Animal Feed Operations (CAFOs), as well as pesticides and fertilizers used to grow animal feed around the U.S. have contaminated 34,000 miles of U.S. rivers and contaminated groundwater in 17 states.

***If humans collectively (especially those living in wealthier nations) drastically reduce consumption of animal-derived foods now, it could slow the pace of global warming, providing humanity some desperately needed time to shift to green energy and maybe even delay a climate and environmental disaster waiting to happen in the next few decades.***