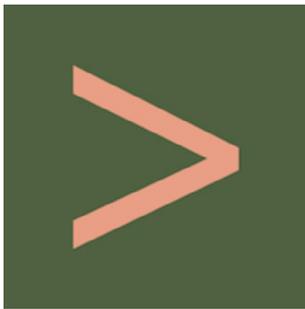


# Default Veg Proposal



*Avodah inspires their participants to become leaders for social change whose work for justice is rooted in and nourished by Jewish values. Aligning our food choices with these values is one of the most impactful ways we can actualize our principles on an organizational level. Avodah is adopting [DefaultVeg](#) for all meetings and events we host to shift our purchasing practices away from factory farming -- a root cause of social and environmental injustice.*

By serving plant-based meals by default, we at Avodah achieve closer alignment with the values we hold dear in Judaism, such as shmirat ha'adamah (protecting the Earth), tza'ar ba'alei chayim (preventing cruelty toward animals), oshet (labor justice), and tikkun olam (repairing the world). Following standard American food practices that center animal products — a tacit endorsement of the factory farm system that produces 99% of this food, including kosher products - threatens the planet, perpetuates worker and animal cruelty, and endangers the health of vulnerable communities impacted most by this industry. For these reasons, we see adopting DefaultVeg as a simple and inclusive way to leverage our power toward building more just food systems while promoting Jewish teachings of compassion and sustainability.

A DefaultVeg menu features plant-based meals as the default option, while giving diners the choice to add or opt into meat and/or dairy options upon request. Simply by changing the default food options, consumers are much more likely to choose a plant-based meal, even when meat and dairy options are available.

DefaultVeg is a simple and inclusive way to offer sustainable meals that reduce harm to people, animals, and our planet as detailed below:

## For Communities and social justice

While abuse and abysmal treatment of animals on factory farms, [which produce 99-percent of the animal products available today](#), are well-known and documented, the hidden destructive impact of these mass-feeding operations on their surrounding communities, often low-income communities of color, are disastrous. Environmental pollution from nearby industrial agriculture operations results in extreme health disparities causing respiratory illnesses and asthma. Worse, the amount of animal waste produced by livestock and poultry in factory farms is almost [13 times more than that produced by the entire US population](#). Livestock manure, unlike human waste, is not treated before it is disposed of. The untreated manure emits airborne chemicals and fumes, and when runoff occurs, dangerous pollutants enter our waterways as there is too much waste for the land to absorb. This animal waste causes noxious odors, as well as air and water pollution, decreasing the value of surrounding properties and contributes to ongoing/heightened poverty levels. And globally, the impact of animal agriculture on impoverished communities is devastating - [82 percent of starving children live in countries where food is fed to animals, and those animals are then eaten by western countries](#).

By adopting a plant-forward food policy, Avodah also adopts a way of eating that least contributes to the oppression of disenfranchised communities both here and around the globe.



## For Workers

Slaughterhouses and meat producers have abysmal labor practices historically, and which have [worsened during the pandemic](#). Factory farmworkers, many of whom are immigrant workers of color, are forced to work in oppressive, dangerous conditions to bring cheap meat to the masses. The Bureau of Labor Statistics revealed that workers in meatpacking plants were [twice as likely to be injured](#), and those working within the poultry processing industry stood a 1.6 higher risk of injury—rates were much higher than other industries, including construction. Every day, 27 workers suffer on-the-job amputations or injuries that require hospitalization, according to a recent [report](#) from the National Employment Law Project. Despite these extreme and dangerous work conditions, laborers are often not offered health insurance or disability compensation, meaning an injury on the job could result in a lifetime of lost income, forcing employees into poverty. A separate study conducted by [Oxfam America](#) found that poultry workers were routinely denied bathroom breaks which often forced them to wear adult diapers on the job. These are not the values Avodah stands by. By choosing Default Veg, we shift demand for cheap animal products and avoid contributing to these unjust and cruel means of producing food.

## For the Environment

Meat and dairy are the [most climate-intensive foods](#). Eating more plant-based foods is one of the most effective ways individuals can reduce climate change. Statistically, if cattle were their own nation, they would be the [world's third-largest emitter of greenhouse gases](#). According to the journal Science, meat, aquaculture, dairy, and eggs contribute about [57 percent of food's greenhouse gas emissions](#) but only provide 18 percent of our calories. Switching 1,000 meals to DefaultVeg saves 1,600 kg CO<sub>2</sub>eq, an amount of pollution equivalent to driving an average passenger vehicle 4,140.9 miles. Additionally, animal agriculture is the [number one contributor](#) to deforestation, species extinction, ocean dead zones, water pollution, and habitat destruction. Right now, we are living in the [largest mass extinction in 65 million years](#). These atrocities to our planet are human-made and must be corrected by human action. As the last generation to be able to prevent irreparable damage to our planet, it is our Jewish and human obligation to take action and mitigate our environmental footprint for future generations - and our own.



## For the Animals

Annually, 70 billion farmed animals are reared as livestock. More than [6 million animals are killed for food every hour](#). In the U.S., more than 99 percent of farmed animals live on factory farms. To maximize profits, animals living on factory farms are confined in uncomfortably small spaces. For example, egg-laying hens are kept in wire cages too small for them to even spread their wings. Pigs are locked in metal crates the width and length of their bodies, unable to even turn around. On factory farms, animals cannot root around in the soil, build nests, raise their families, or engage in other natural behaviors important to their well-being. As the time for slaughter approaches, new genetics promoting fast growth leave some animals unable even to walk. The US Animal Welfare Act passed in 1966 exempts “farm animals, such as domestic cattle, horses, sheep, swine and goats” from its protections. Although some states have created their own animal welfare laws, most of these are designed to defend the interests of meat producers or companion animals like dogs and cats. The United States, a [leading poultry exporter](#)- excludes all chickens and turkeys from its Humane Methods of Slaughter Act. More than [three out of four consumers say that they are concerned about the welfare of animals raised for human food](#). By adopting Default Veg, we are acting upon those concerns and making a commitment to reduce as much unnecessary harm as possible within the mainstream food system.

## For Jewish Values

Of our 613 commandments, nearly a quarter of them have to do with food, food preparation, animal welfare, and the environmental impact of our lifestyles. This clearly shows the intentionality of Jewish law to cause the least amount of harm possible to animals, communities, and the environment. By serving plant-based meals by default, we at Avodah achieve closer alignment with the principles we hold dear in Judaism. This includes values such as *shmirat ha'adamah* (protecting the Earth), *tza'ar ba'alei chayim* (preventing cruelty toward animals), *oshek* (labor justice), and *tikkun olam* (repairing the world).

Following standard American food practices that center animal products—a tacit endorsement of the factory farm system that produces 99 percent of this food, including kosher products, threatens the planet, perpetuates worker and animal cruelty, and endangers the health of vulnerable communities impacted by this industry. For these reasons, we see adopting DefaultVeg as a key way to leverage our power toward building a healthier, more resilient food system while promoting Jewish teachings of compassion, sustainability, and justice.

## Avodah Action Steps: Implementing DefaultVegs

For years, Avodah has leaned into a vegetarian and vegan-friendly diet in the workplace. While these choices are common across the organization for meetings and events, they have not been formally adopted by our organization. By adopting DefaultVeg, Avodah can more fully own our place in the food and environmental justice space and formalize our food policy across the organization.

Default Veg can be implemented in any food setting. Below are two resources specifically for how to implement DefaultVeg in two of the most common settings, in conferences and offices.

- [DefaultVeg Conference Guide](#)
- [DefaultVeg Office Guide](#)

Adopting Default Veg would apply to Avodah's organizational events, meetings, and conferences. In our communal living programs, our participants will communally decide their food preferences, as they always have, but we will share the values associated with Avodah's adoption of DefaultVeg with our participants and encourage participation whenever possible. For remote events and meetings that include Avodah-funded meals, participants are reminded of our DefaultVeg policy and to choose plant-based meals when possible. For in-person events, catering and meals will be vegan/vegetarian/plant-based and meat meals/options can be made upon request. Avodah will include public information on our website about our DefaultVeg participation and the reasons behind our decision to further amplify our values-inspired actions.

