



March 14, 2019

Assemblymember Patrick O'Donnell, Chair  
Assembly Education Committee  
State Capitol  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: SUPPORT for A.B. 479 –California Climate-Friendly Food Program**

Dear Chair O'Donnell,

On behalf of the Plant Based Foods Association and our 66 members in the state, I am writing to express our strong support for A.B. 479, the California Climate-Friendly Food Act. By incentivizing climate-friendly, plant-based school meals, AB 479 will increase access to healthy food and help California measurably reduce the greenhouse gas emissions associated with the 540 million school lunches served in the state each year. It will also provide support for staff training and other technical assistance needed to help our schools boost meal participation rates and successfully serve plant-based entrees and milk options.

PBFA is a membership trade association representing more than 130 companies around the nation making plant-based foods, mostly alternatives to meat and dairy products. California is a strong leader in sustainable foods and a hub of innovation for many of our member companies. Many members proudly source California-grown ingredients such as almonds and other nuts, as well as grains, seeds, and vegetables.

Plant-based foods typically use far fewer resources. For example, beans and lentils are 26 to 34 times less carbon-intensive and use far less water than beef, and soymilk generates half the emissions of cow's milk.

**AB 479 would also improve student access to healthy foods and promote equity.** According to the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, on average, children are not eating enough vegetables, legumes, nuts, seeds, and other plant-based foods.



Meanwhile, Californians are suffering from adverse health effects associated with overconsumption of meat, including diabetes, heart disease, and even some forms of cancer. Increased consumption of plant-based foods reduces the risks of developing these costly diet-related diseases.

It is particularly important that schools offer plant-based entrée and milk options for students with lactose intolerance or dairy allergies. The National Institutes of Health estimates that 60-80% of African Americans and 50-80% of Hispanic people are lactose intolerant. As California's public schools increasingly serve a diverse population, we must ensure every student has access to culturally and nutritionally appropriate meals.

Plant-based foods are increasingly in demand for health, environmental, cultural, and ethical reasons, but schools often face financial barriers because animal-based products are often subsidized by the government relative to plant-based options.

We have many members who have expressed great interest in having their foods available in schools, but they face barriers to entry. This bill will help remove those barriers, while improving our environment and the health of our students, a win-win.

The State of California has an immense opportunity to make a meaningful impact on public health and the environment by passing A.B. 479 to increase access to healthy, climate-friendly meals for school children across the state. Thank you for your consideration, and I respectfully urge your support.

Sincerely,

Michele Simon, executive director  
Plant Based Foods Association

cc. Assemblymember Adrin Nazarian  
Members of the Assembly Education Committee