

UCLA School of Law- Food Law and Policy

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TOFU, IT'S WHAT'S FOR LUNCH: COMPASSION OVER KILLING AND UCLA LAW PARTNER TO REDUCE ANIMAL PRODUCTS AND INCREASE PLANT-BASED FOODS IN SCHOOL LUNCHES

In an effort to reduce consumption of animal products, Compassion Over Killing (COK) has partnered with UCLA School of Law's Food Law and Policy Clinic to help California schools replace meat with plant-based protein sources in school lunches. The Clinic's inaugural class decided to pursue this project to encourage young people to make dining choices that are good for their health, for animals, and the environment. Members of the Clinic are working closely with Cheryl Leahy, General Counsel for COK and a fellow UCLA Law alumna.

In 2012, Los Angeles Unified School District adopted the Good Food Purchasing Policy, which provides standards and support to help major institutions utilize healthy, local, sustainable, fair and humanely procured food. This policy has also been adopted by San Francisco and Oakland Unified School Districts, and has active campaigns from Austin to Chicago.

While the institution of this policy has led to positive changes in school meals, there is still considerable room for improvement. As an example, the typical vegetarian option on a school lunch menu is often a tired permutation of bread and cheese, and it is estimated that one in six children in California are significantly overweight. Furthermore, as of 2012, it is estimated that over half of public school children in the United States are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Through this project, the Clinic hopes to revitalize school lunch options and move away from meals that routinely include animal products. Doing so will help address the childhood obesity crisis, promote animal welfare, and encourage environmentally friendly habits.

A recent case study at Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) found that replacing meat with plant-based protein in school meals is a cost-effective way to produce important public health benefits and achieve environmental goals, such as reducing water consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. For example, OUSD reduced its carbon footprint 14 percent by utilizing more plant-based proteins in their meals and saved approximately \$42,000 in the process. With over 800 million school meals served annually, California schools can save money while making a dramatic impact on child nutrition, animals and the environment by moving towards plant-based menus.

Students in the Food Law and Policy Clinic have engaged in the local community through interviews and meetings with community experts. These community experts – from dietitians, to school dining service directors, to non-profit policy coordinators – work to promote sustainable dining systems in elementary schools, hospitals, jails, and universities, and have been an invaluable resource to the Clinic.

The Clinic is working specifically with Dr. Robert Lewis, the nutritional services director at El Monte City School District (EMCSD). EMCSD strives to provide affordable and healthy meals to students and offer high quality nutrition programs to promote healthy lifestyles and achieve academic success. EMCSD is already a very successful district: they have been acknowledged

multiple times by USDA and the White House for their commitment to child nutrition. In 2016, schools in EMCSD were recognized with gold and silver awards through the USDA Healthier US Schools Challenge. Dr. Lewis is excited to work with the Clinic, and hopes to implement new recipes with fewer animal products for the 2017-2018 school year.

The Clinic is assembling a handbook to be used by schools around the country. The handbook will outline applicable regulations, offer menu suggestions, connect schools to available resources, and discuss solutions to frequently encountered problems. By enlisting the help of registered dietitians from the Humane Society, the Clinic will design sample menus that are as delicious and nutritious as possible. The guide will advise school administrations on how to overcome barriers, such as low participation in student meal programs and cost of implementation, by using taste-testing and student feedback to ensure student buy-in, and by reaching out to meat-alternative suppliers and researching cost-saving methods.

Tatiana Altman, a third-year law student in the Clinic, remarked that, "after working on this project, I am optimistic about the future of school dining systems. The many passionate people we've encountered during this process through interviews, meetings, and our research demonstrate that there is a strong desire to make sure kids from all backgrounds have access to healthy, sustainable food."

The Clinic will continue to contact partners in school districts throughout California and assist them in implementing menu changes for the 2017-2018 school year. A shared goal of the Clinic, Compassion Over Killing, school administrators, students, and parents is a healthier and more sustainable dining system that students enjoy and are motivated to support.