

New York to Track Residents' Food Purchases and Place 'Caps on Meat' Served by Public Institutions

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New York City will begin tracking the carbon footprint of household food consumption and putting caps on how much red meat can be served in public institutions as part of a sweeping initiative to achieve a 33% reduction in carbon emissions from food by 2030.

[Mayor Eric Adams](#) and representatives from the Mayor's Office of Food Policy and Mayor's Office of Climate & Environmental Justice announced the new programs last month at a Brooklyn culinary center run by [NYC Health + Hospitals](#), the city's public healthcare system, just before Earth Day.

At the event, the Mayor's Office of Climate & Environmental Justice shared a new chart to be included in the city's annual [greenhouse gas inventory](#) that publicly tracks the carbon footprint created by [household food consumption](#), the Gothamist reported.

The city already produced emissions data from energy use, transportation and waste as part of the annual inventory. But the addition of household food consumption data is part of a partnership that London and New York launched with [American Express, C40 Cities](#) and EcoData lab, Commissioner [Rohit Aggarwala](#) from the NYC Department of Environmental Protection announced at the event.

Aggarwala — who founded Google [smart city](#) subsidiary [Sidewalk Labs](#) — celebrated the expanded data collection as forging “a new standard for what cities have to do” and a new way to shape policy.

He said the inventory also will measure greenhouse gas pollution from the production and consumption of other consumer goods like apparel, whether or not those items are made in New York City. It also tracks emissions tied to services like air travel and healthcare.

But Adams' presentation at the event focused on food consumption, particularly meat and

dairy.

“Food is the third-biggest source of cities’ emissions right after buildings and transportation,” Adams said. “But all food is not created equal. The vast majority of food that is contributing to our emission crises lies in meat and dairy products.”

He added:

“It is easy to talk about the emissions that’s coming from buildings and how it impacts our environment, but we now have to talk about beef. And I don’t know if people are ready for this conversation.”

Adams — a vegan who, according to a whistleblower, also eats fish, credits his “[plant-based diet](#)” for his recovery from diabetes. He is the author of “[Healthy at Last: A Plant-Based Approach to Preventing and Reversing Diabetes and Other Chronic Illnesses](#),” a vegan cookbook.

Adams claims that changing New Yorkers’ eating habits will have both climate and health benefits. He said:

“We already know that a plant-powered diet is better for your physical and mental health, and I am living proof of that. But the reality is that thanks to this new inventory, we’re finding out it is better for the planet.”

But agricultural economists and regenerative farmers say that calculation isn’t actually that simple.

“Different meats have different kinds of greenhouse gas footprints” because of differences in the production systems and “all land is not created equal” [Melissa McKendree, Ph.D.](#), an agricultural economist at Michigan State University, told [The Defender](#).

Land that is suitable for cattle production, such as rangeland and pasture, often isn’t suitable for other types of agriculture, and vice versa. And all of those different ecosystems for different plants and animals, when working well, work together to create a healthy ecosystem.

Alternative grazing systems, like the [regenerative agricultural systems](#) that McKendree researches, make it possible for pasture-raised beef “to sequester carbon, and to become a carbon sink” — actually reducing the [greenhouse gas footprint](#) of food production rather than adding to it.

Regenerative livestock farmer [Will Harris](#) told The Defender, “As a practitioner who has been regenerating depleted land for 30+ years I can tell you that regenerating land is about restarting the cycles of nature that have been broken by industrial farming — and restarting those cycles cannot be done cost effectively without animal impact.”

He continued:

“All ecosystems evolved with certain kinds of animal impact and to say we’ve misused technologies to break these cycles of nature and we are going to start them back by leaving out this essential ingredient that has been around for millennia is wrong.

“Sadly there is a percentage of the populace that for whatever reason has decided that animals in the ecosystem are bad and the way to have a healthier planet is to give up that animal impact.

“Many of us have proven that there is benefit, ecological benefit to having animal impact in the equation. It has to be done right, but when it is done right there is an ecological benefit, an ecological service that we provide.

“But this sector of society is so committed to the vegetarian vegan solution, that it doesn’t matter what we demonstrate, they are going to paint us with that same brush.

“They drown out our voices by screaming the same misapplied science over and over and over.”

Organization behind 15-minute city is mapping consumption-based emissions for New York and London

The partnership between American Express, New York, London and C40 Cities to map urban emissions was formally launched last week in a [C40 press release](#). The groups will map the consumption-based emissions of both New York and London.

The press release does not make the purpose of emissions mapping inventories explicit. It simply states the inventories “will enable London and New York City to develop a suite of actions to incentivise more sustainable consumption in collaboration with people and businesses.”

It adds that the project “will also pioneer new ways for other cities to measure emissions from urban consumption,” adding that there is an “urgent need to reduce the emissions impact of urban consumption, especially what is eaten and the waste in food systems.”

To that end, “Building data inventories in partnership with city businesses (such as supermarket chains and retailers) is important for cities to measure, plan and act to ensure our cities become better places to live for all people and sustainable business can thrive.”

The press release bases its claims on [a report](#) by the University of Leeds and developer [Arup Group](#).

Arup is a [Rockefeller-supported](#), [World Economic Forum-affiliated](#) organization that uses “[fourth industrial revolution](#)” technologies to transform cities. They promise that immense quantities of highly detailed data, “can produce a “new level of control” making possible “more efficient and sustainable use of the world’s precious materials.”

The report assesses consumption-based emissions in C40 cities across the world produced by food, clothing, transportation, building infrastructure and household appliances and calls for those emissions to be halved by 2030.

In the same press release, Adams announced that New York has signed on to the [C40 Good Food Cities Accelerator](#), where signatory cities commit to achieving a “planetary healthy diet” by 2030, defined by more “plant-based foods,” less meat and dairy and less food waste overall.

[C40 Cities](#) Climate Leadership Group is also one of the forces driving the implementation of

[15-minute city projects](#) across the world.

The group comprises 96 mayors of cities from around the world, is [funded by](#) major corporations and philanthropic foundations and focuses on urban activism for climate change.

Then-Mayor of London Mayor Ken Livingstone founded C40 in 2005 when he convened mayors from 18 cities to agree to cap climate emissions. In 2006, C40 [merged with the Clinton Climate Initiative](#). In July 2020, the group published a framework for cities to “[build back better](#).”

Bloomberg Philanthropies is one of C40’s major funders. Former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg previously unsuccessfully tried to impose top-down changes on how New Yorkers consume by instituting a wide-scale [ban on large sodas](#) and other sugary drinks. The policy was [struck down](#) by a state Supreme Court judge.

Will ‘meat caps’ really lower emissions and improve health?

Mayor Adams’ announcement about the C40 Good Food Cities declaration suggests the city will be serving less meat in the future to meet its 2030 goals. Officials from his administration did not specify the targets or the standards that would be used, but did indicate there would be “caps on meat.”

Kate MacKenzie, executive director of the [Mayor’s Office of Food Policy](#), explained that the standards they are developing “set maximums for the number of times that red meat can be served each week and really introduces the plant-based proteins and a floor for that.”

“So it’s really the caps on meat,” she said, adding that the city has been moving in this direction already.

New York already instituted “[meatless Mondays](#)” as a joint initiative by Adams and former Mayor Bill De Blasio in 2019. “[Vegan Friday](#)” began in public schools last year, where children are served food such as pre-packaged burritos that received reviews such as “nasty” and “sad” on the Brian Lehrer WNYC call-in show.

Meals in the city’s hospitals have been made vegetarian by default, although people can request meat if they prefer.

New York [spends roughly \\$300 million](#) buying food for schools, homeless shelters, hospitals and prisons each year. According to the [NYC Food Policy Dashboard](#), the city spends only about 1% of its food budget on “ruminant meats.”

New York’s initiative is part of a broader move by global policymakers toward targeting the food system — and [meat in particular](#) — as a source of emissions. Proposals have ranged from an [outright ban](#) on meat consumption to various types of incentives to minimize meat consumption, encourage [lab-grown or alternative meat](#) production to putting extra taxes on meat or forcing animal farmers to stop producing, as in the case of the [Dutch farmers](#).

Meat bans, McKendree said, are “the most extreme policy [for addressing environmental impacts of meat production]. Think about what we ban. We ban toxic chemicals like Agent Orange and things that we know have those environmental impacts.”

She continued:

“But when we think about making policies, we have to ask, what’s the issue of concern? And we want to try to target that exact issue. So if our concern is reducing greenhouse gas emissions, then put policies in place that directly reduce carbon or greenhouse gas emissions.

“But banning beef doesn’t have a direct carbon or greenhouse gas emissions effect, it creates a reduction in meat consumption.”

Instead, she said, policymakers could consider a wide range of other policies — from creating certified products, to subsidies, to taxes, to education through cooperative extension at universities like hers — that would support farmers to produce meat using regenerative practices.

“I think there’s other options and opportunities besides banning or capping meat products,” she said.

In its March 2023 report on U.S. [biotechnology and biomanufacturing](#) innovation, the White House emphasized a coming focus on climate-centric agriculture in the biotech industry.

The report followed a September 2022 “[Executive Order on Advancing Biotechnology and Biomanufacturing Innovation](#) for a Sustainable, Safe and Secure American Bioeconomy,” which paves the way for biotechnology to take over food production by opening the door to more lab-grown meats and bioengineered plant foods.

Specific plans in the March “[Bold Goals](#)” report include reducing methane emissions from agriculture by 30% by 2030, in part by reducing methane emissions from ruminant livestock.

As policymakers across the world crack down on meat production, the alternative to meat markets, lab-grown meat industry and [insect protein](#) markets are booming.

Many [meat alternatives](#) require [energy-intensive production](#) and are [ultra-processed](#), so may have serious environmental and health impacts

[Obesity](#), Type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, [cancer](#) and depression are but a few examples of conditions known to be promoted and exacerbated by a [processed food diet](#).

For example, a December 2022 study in Sweden found many plant-based meat alternatives have very high phytate levels — antinutrients that inhibit the absorption of minerals in the human body.

As a result, while the meat substitute may appear to contain many of the necessary nutrients, such as iron, the body cannot absorb them according to a report in [NutritionInsight](#).

Harris said the processed foods that will likely replace the meat that they are taking out of the meals are “less healthy, less good for the environment, and less good for the local rural economy that is rebounding by raising food right. There’s a lot of losers in this.”

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