



*Better*  
**FOOD**  
FOUNDATION

2022 ANNUAL REPORT

**Better Food,  
by Default**

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# Notes from the Executive Director

When we founded the Better Food Foundation in 2017 our ambition was simply to apply our team’s passion, energy, and experience to the challenging goal of transforming diets. Empowered with start-up funding, we sought out gaps in the plant-based diet movement that we could fill, promising strategies we could test, and partners whose impact was undervalued. Five years later, this inquisitive and opportunistic approach has led us to focus on two areas:

**First, we’re incubating strategies that create *normative change***—that is, changes to the cultures, community practices, and institutional structures that shape people’s food choices. These are strategies that impact large *groups* of people at once—schools, neighborhoods, professions, identities. These strategies utilize *behavioral nudges* like “plant-based defaults” and communication tactics like “dynamic norms language” that alter the *environments* in which people make food choices, sending the message that plant-based foods are the easiest, most popular, and best choice, resulting in dramatic changes in people’s food choices.

**Second, we’re partnering with *community-based* leaders who are transforming food culture in their own neighborhoods, faith communities, and ethnic communities.** This isn’t only because these types of activists tend to be underfunded relative to their impact (though decades of sociological research shows that they are). It’s because food choices aren’t shaped in a vacuum—our communities and our identities play a major role in how we eat.

In 2022 we reached major milestones in our work to change defaults in large-scale institutions: New York City’s public hospital system, Sodexo’s university dining services, and LinkedIn’s San Francisco offices all launched pilots, under the guidance of our team, in which they switched to plant-based defaults.



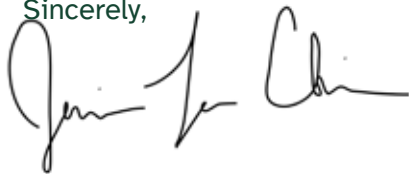
- In **NYC's hospitals**, the pilot led to **more than 50 percent** of patients choosing plant-based meals, even though less than one percent identified as vegetarian or vegan
- In **Sodexo's university dining halls**, the pilot resulted in an average increase in the uptake of plant-based meals **from 31 percent to 81.5 percent** when implemented consistently
- **At LinkedIn**, the pilot resulted in a **50 percent** reduction in the amount of animal meat served, while diner satisfaction remained constant, according to a Sodexo rep

Not only have these pilots given us valuable data about *how* to effectively nudge diners to choose plant-based foods, they've also opened the door for others. Now we are seizing the opportunity to *level up* and bring behavioral nudge strategies to more institutions and people, flipping more meals, and increasing our impact on animals, the environment, and human health.

In this report we'll share not only our work in 2022, but also the steps we are taking for *scaling* these strategies in 2023. That's because when a diet-change strategy *works*, it's not enough for us to own and use it ourselves—we want to spread this knowledge so that everyone can use it.

It has taken the financial support, encouragement, and wise advice of many people to reach this point. In diet-change activism it often feels like we're trying to do the impossible right up until the moment when the impossible becomes reality. It's exciting to be working on the cutting edge of change, and we hope that those of you who have helped us get here also feel proud and emboldened by the progress that we've made together.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Channin  
Executive Director, Better Food Foundation



# BFF Launches Pilots in 2022 that Demonstrate the Power of Plant-Based Defaults

DefaultVeg is a simple but transformative concept: By changing how food is presented, we can influence (“nudge”) people to make food choices that are better for the environment, public health, and animals. A growing body of research has demonstrated that across a wide variety of events, this simple technique—making plant-based meals the default option—on average *more than doubles* the uptake of plant-based meals.

In 2022 we completed three first-of-their kind pilots (with NYC Health + Hospitals, Sodexo Universities, and LinkedIn) that each, in their own way, demonstrate the power of plant-based defaults to shift meals and food norms. They also provide us with valuable case studies and toolkits to use in 2023 as we expand the defaultveg approach to more institutions.



## BFF Partners with NYC Health + Hospitals

In September 2022, at the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Health, New York City Health+Hospitals announced that, in partnership with the Better Food Foundation (BFF), they had begun a pilot project, introducing a new plants-by-default lunch menu for patients at all 11 of their public hospitals.



This simple but powerful menu flip has led to a dramatic change—**now more than half of eligible patients are choosing plant-based meals, even when meat and dairy are available! These numbers are staggering considering that only one percent of patients identify as vegetarian or vegan.** At the time of the announcement, NYC Health + Hospitals released their first data set, which showed that their changes would impact 800,000 meals per year. In early 2023 they made a second announcement—they had taken the pilot a step further and expanded it to their dinner menus as well!

### PLANT-BASED DEFAULTS IN THE MEDIA:

The story of NYC's Public Hospitals switching to plant-based defaults was covered by dozens of outlets, including *ABC News*, the *New York Daily News*, the *South Asian Times*, *Yahoo News*, and *amNY*!

“When we first heard about going plant-forward, I thought it was going to be more difficult.”

– Philip DeMaiolo, Corporate Chef Sodexo

“We can teach our patients how to make those changes and it’s just a domino effect in a really positive way!”

– Samantha Morgenstern, Sr Director of Nutrition Services, Sodexo

**amNY**

Eat & Drink

‘It’s not our DNA, it’s our dinner:’ 60% of patients at three NYC hospitals sticking with vegan meal options, City Hall says

By Dean Moses

Posted on October 10, 2023



# BFF Commissions First-of-its-kind Study in Three Sodexo-run University Dining Halls

In Fall 2022, the first ever multi-site research study on plant-based defaults within all-you-care-to-eat dining halls was undertaken at Tulane University, Lehigh University, and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI). Commissioned and supported by BFF, the study was conducted by our research partner, Food for Climate League, in collaboration with Sodexo and lead researcher Dr. Gregg Sparkman of Boston College. The study was undertaken with three objectives:

- 1** To fill in knowledge gaps about the impact of using plant-based defaults in university dining halls
- 2** To develop easy-to-use tips, toolkits and presentations to help other dining halls implement plant-based most effectively
- 3** To nudge Sodexo to implement plant-based defaults more widely across their own 900 university operations

We released the “Executive Summary Report” of the study in Spring, 2023 with the study’s major findings. These included:

On days when the **plant-based dish** was served as the **default option**, we observed a

↓ **23.6% REDUCTION**  
in food-related  
**greenhouse gas emissions.**

When defaults are implemented consistently, average take rate of plant-based dishes increased

**30.8% → 81.5%**  
**CONTROL INTERVENTION**  
without any other changes  
to the dining experience.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY MAY 2023

## SERVING UP PLANTS BY DEFAULT

Optimizing variety, health, and sustainability of all-you-care-to-eat university dining with plant-based defaults.



Green Olives

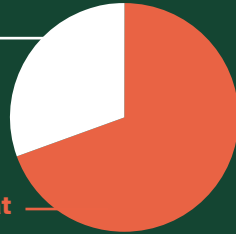
Tofu

At Tulane and Lehigh this shift was more pronounced.

On Control Days

30.8%

of dishes served were plant-based



69.2% were meat

On Plant Default Days

81.5%

of dishes served were plant-based



18.5% were meat

## WHAT WE ANALYZED

15,278  
dishes

We analyzed station serving data encompassing 15,278 dishes to assess changes in the number of plant-based and meat dishes served and calculated the resulting reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

52 staff survey response  
9 post-study interviews

We analyzed 52 survey responses and 9 post-study interviews with dining hall staff members to understand how their day-to-day responsibilities were affected during the default's implementation.

211 student survey responses

We analyzed 211 survey responses from students to understand their eating habits and satisfaction with the dishes served.

## WHERE WE TESTED

3 university dining hall stations





# DefaultVeg Campaigns

In 2022 BFF expanded its public-facing campaigns that advance institutional food policy changes, empower activists to shift food norms, and accelerate plant-forward trends in popular culture and business.



## BFF Helps Cities Flip Food Norms

Leveraging the groundbreaking NYC Hospitals pilot, BFF launched our *Cities Flip Food Norms* campaign, to get other cities to follow NYC's example in their hospitals and in their climate action plans. The campaign has so far led to deepened partnerships with local allies in more than a dozen cities in the US and abroad, including Denver, Colorado, San Diego, California (where we had *already* helped the city make diet change part of their new Climate Action Plan), Washington, D.C., and Edinburgh, Scotland.



San Diego passed an updated version of their Climate Action Plan which included, for the first time, a pledge to reduce the city's meat- and dairy-related emissions, and water footprint, by 20 percent. BFF's team had worked with city officials and local food system activists for more than a year to get this diet change language included in the Plan, and now we're pushing to have plant-based defaults used in the city's implementation of the plan.



Our partnership with Washington DC Veg Restaurant Week resulted in a **proclamation of support by DC Mayor Muriel Bowser** calling for a shift toward plant-based foods.

The media coverage of the proclamation had an estimated reach of **31 million people!**

“It is so rewarding to be a part of getting such a monumental and important policy passed in my city. I hope that this decision will inspire and lead the way for other cities to do the same.”

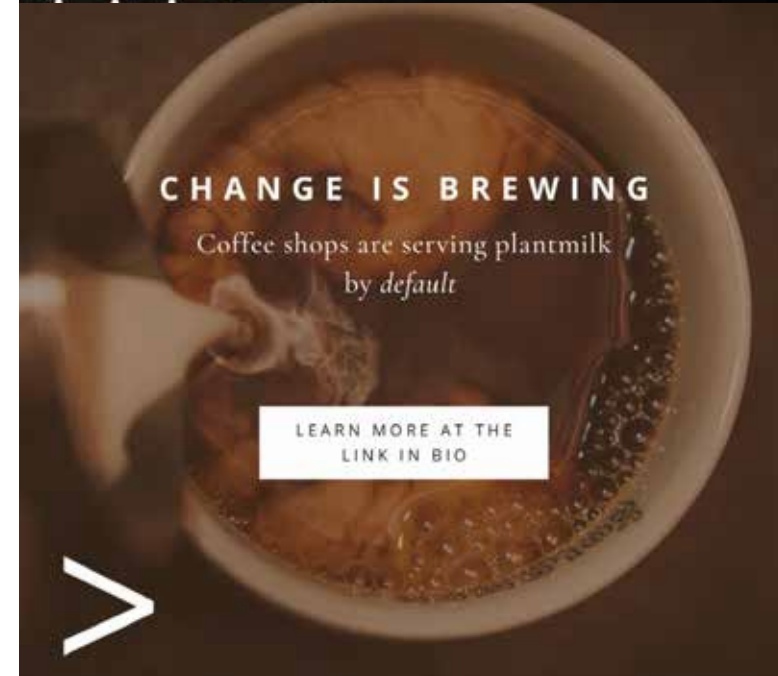
– Denver resident **Claudia Clifton**, who facilitated the Mayor's Sustainability Council's commitment to a **DefaultVeg** food policy

# BFF Campaign Flips the Default in Coffee

During the holiday season at the end of 2022 we launched our *Change is Brewing* campaign, focused on coffee shops serving oat milk by default.

Plant-based milks have been around for centuries, but in the past five years the industry has grown to a market value of \$20 billion. That rise is partially fueled by eco-minded and racially diverse young people, who are consuming 550 percent more plant-based milk than previous generations.

An increasing number of coffee shops are ditching the dairy default (e.g. *Gilder* in Portland, which launched an oatmilk pilot with BFF in 2021), serving specialty drinks based in oat milk (e.g. *Peet's Coffee*, *Starbucks*), or serving oat milk as their new default (e.g. *Birch*, *Blue Bottle*, *Onyx*, *Pachamama*). Employees and students are driving similar shifts in offices and campus settings. Our *Change is Brewing* campaign is accelerating this change through public education and PR, and by launching new oatmilk-by-default initiatives on college campuses.



# College Campuses Lead the Way

In 2022 we continued to grow our DefaultVeg Ambassadors Program. We're partnering with groups like the Factory Farming Awareness Coalition to teach students how to advocate for DefaultVeg on their campuses, as well as training activists in partner organizations like Mercy for Animals and the Plant-based Treaty to advocate for DefaultVeg strategies in universities, corporations, city governments and other institutions.

**In 2022, student ambassadors successfully persuaded student organizations to adopt DefaultVeg policies and practices at New York University, Northwestern University, the University of San Diego, and Stanford University.**



## DefaultVeg expands operations, results in passed ASG resolution toward sustainable catering



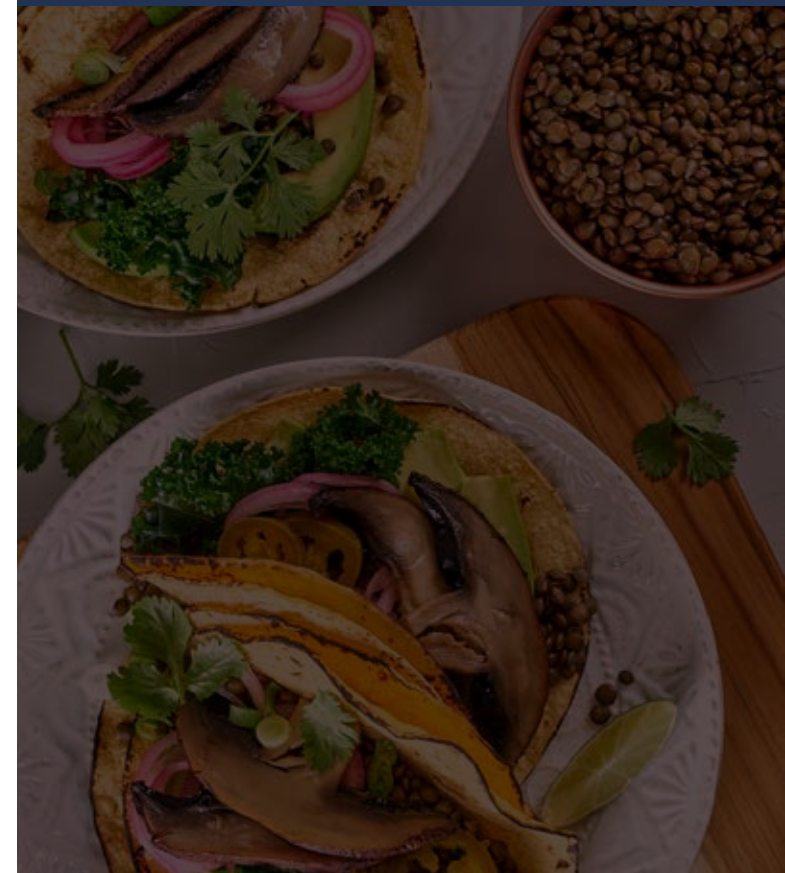
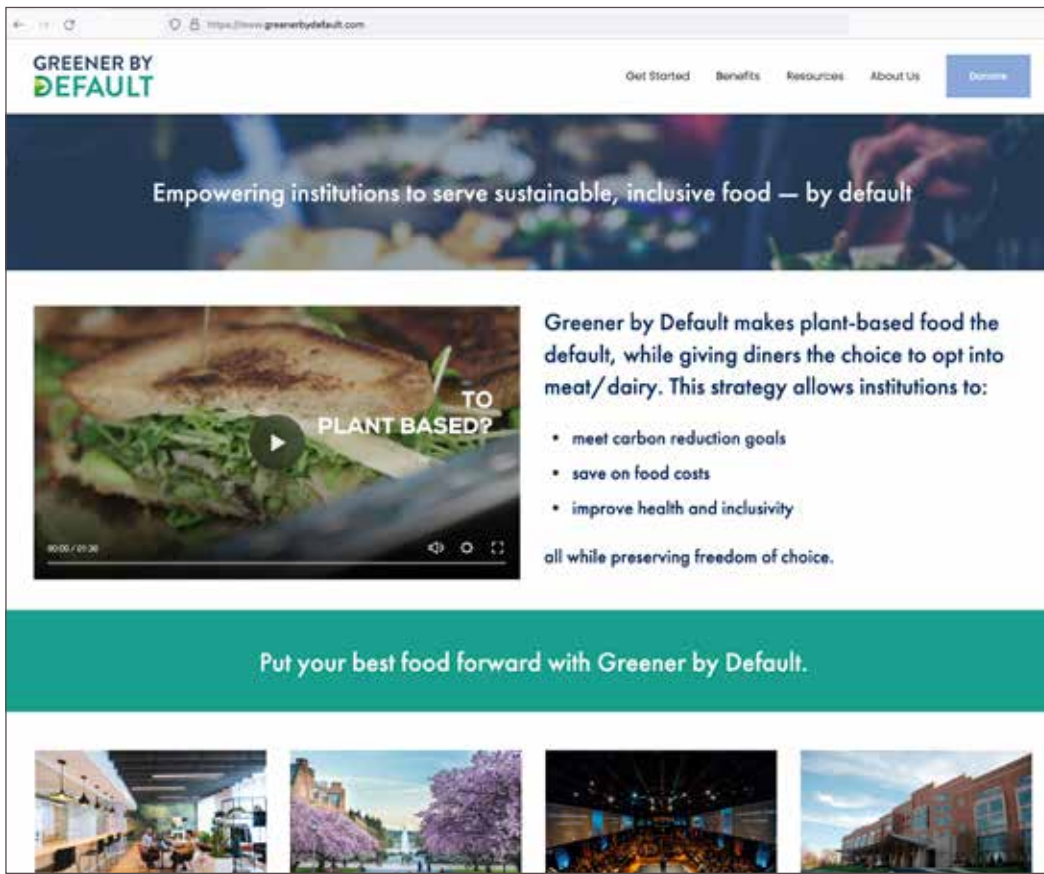
# Growing Our Capacity & Scaling

Since June 2022, we've made a number of changes to our team structure with the aim of scaling our work more rapidly, transforming more institutions and reaching larger mainstream audiences.



# Greener by Default Brand Becomes New Organization

Greener by Default, which got its start as a brand within the DefaultVeg initiative tailored to corporate sustainability audiences, is now the name of a new organization, which officially launched on January 1, 2023! The new Greener by Default, which is led by two of our former team members, Ilana Braverman and Katie Cantrell, provides technical assistance and consulting services to large institutions to help them adopt behavioral nudges like defaults in their dining operations. The process to incubate and spin off the new organization began in the summer of 2022, and was motivated by the increased opportunities to serve new institutional clients after the announcement of the NYC Hospitals, LinkedIn and Sodexo pilots.



## Growing the BFF Team & Upgrading our Online Presence

Just as we're investing in more specialized approaches to target institutional change, BFF has also grown our in-house team. In 2022 we began searches that led to the hiring of our first PR Manager, Outreach Manager, Marketing Manager, and Content Manager! These four new team members, who joined us in early 2023, are all focused on expanding the impact and reach of our DefaultVeg programs.



In 2022, our work was covered by

**80+**

**MEDIA OUTLETS**

with a combined audience of more than

**135**

**MILLION PEOPLE**

# Movement Building

**Many of the most promising, vital, impactful, and innovative strategies for transforming diets are being incubated and carried out by community-based advocates.** These forms of dietary advocacy benefit from the cultural insights and knowledge these leaders have about their communities, as well as the trust and connections they are able to build. They are also deeply underfunded as a result of systemic inequity in philanthropy at large, as well as the lack of resources available for diet change work more broadly. BFF community-based advocacy partners include the AfroVegan Society, CreatureKind, the Jewish Initiative for Animals, and Liberum.





## Partner Spotlight: Vegan SoulFest

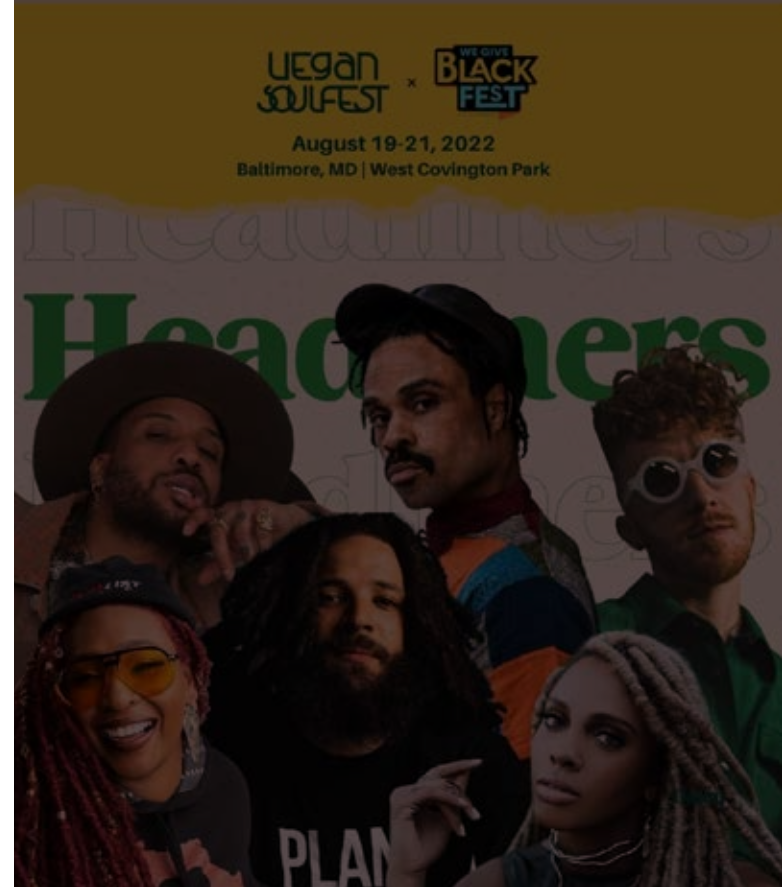
BFF was proud to sponsor, for the third time, Baltimore's Vegan SoulFest, which returned after several years of hiatus in August 2022 with an event that attracted thousands of festival goers! We were especially excited about the new vision of the SoulFest: what started out as a vegan food festival featuring a musical guest is now a *music festival featuring 100 percent vegan food!* We love this powerful example of "Flipping the Norm"!



VEGAN SOULFEST x WE GIVE BLACK FEST  
August 19-21, 2022  
Baltimore, MD | West Covington Park



Vegan SoulFest Co-Founders Naijha Wright Brown and Brend Sanders.



# Sneak Peek: BFF's New Storytelling Platform, *FlipIt*

Speaking of flipping norms, BFF is about to unveil a new initiative called *FlipIt*.

*FlipIt* (flipit.org) will be BFF's new public engagement brand, crafted to showcase the diverse people and organizations **flipping food and culture through *plant-forward thinking***. Primarily featuring videos and written stories about changemakers who are driving the plant-forward movement, *FlipIt* aims to challenge stereotypes about who vegans are and to celebrate and accelerate the changes that are already taking place, across many cultures and communities, toward plant-centered thinking and eating.

*FlipIt* will launch in August 2023 at the Vegan SoulFest music festival in Baltimore, where *FlipIt* is the presenting sponsor.



# Financial Data

Total Expenses \$2,091,216

Programs  
\$1,212,833

58%

Grants to Partners  
\$793,579

38%

Fundraising & Admin  
\$84,804

4%



# Thank You to Our Supporters

In 2022 we received generous support for our own programs and for the programs of our movement building partners from the following organizations and individuals:

Yvette Baker

Lauren Breuer

The Builders Initiative

Coleman Foundation

Jenny Davis-Boyd

EatTheChange Impact

Katie Excoffier

Marilyn Gallegos

Giant Steps Foundation

The Greenbaum Foundation

Zoe Goldberg

Nilang Gor

Matthew Heppler

David Herring

Joanne Kuang

Wei-Tai Kwok

Elizabeth Lerch

Chetana Mirle

Northstar Asset Management

Payne-Brodeur Giving Fund

Naomi Sachs

Brieanah Schwartz

Karthik Sekar

John and Timi Sobrato

And several anonymous donors for whom we are deeply grateful.



**Our vision is a world where  
plant-based foods are the norm.**



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