

****PRESS RELEASE****

Higher education climate policy needs to include food

A case study of the University of California

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In a [paper published July 7](#) in *Climate Policy*, researchers David Cleveland and Jennifer Jay found that by adding food to its climate policies, the University of California (UC) could substantially improve its efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Our goal was “to stimulate discussion about including food in higher education climate policies”, Cleveland said, “since the food system is responsible for up to 30% of emissions, it is essential for effective climate policies to include food”.

The UC provided a good case study, because it is a leader in climate and food research, and has major policy initiatives for mitigating climate change and for promoting healthy, sustainable food systems. With 10 campuses 280,000 students, and 240,000 faculty and staff, the UC is also the third largest employer in California.

Research at higher education institutions has provided most of the evidence that climate and food policies need to be integrated in the critical short term, in order to effectively respond to the climate emergency. Yet the climate policies of most of these institutions focus on the greenhouse gas emissions from campus-generated and purchased energy (Scopes 1 and 2). However, emissions from the life cycles of purchased goods (Scope 3), including food, are often larger than Scopes 1 and 2 combined, but are not included. This paper addresses this often-neglected Scope 3.

The researchers created two sets of scenarios to estimate the potential of including food in climate policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The first set applied the results of studies of US dietary changes to the UC population.

The second set of scenarios estimated the potential of existing, planned or potential food system changes on some UC campuses to reduced emissions if scaled up over all 10 campuses. These included a course on food and the environment, burgers with 30% plant ingredients, substituting water for soda, trayless dining to reduce food waste, and composting food waste.

Within these two sets were scenarios that could reduce UC Scope 3 food emissions by 42-55%, equivalent to 8-9% of UC's 2025 target to reduce energy emissions to zero, and 19-22% of the purchased offsets need to reach that target. The biggest climate benefits were from changes that reduce the amount of meat, especially beef, eaten on campus, and changes that reduce food waste.

Expanding and implementing these changes across all ten campuses would be cheaper, less resource intensive, and more rapid, than changes needed to reduce energy emissions, because they do not require implementing new research, technology or infrastructure.

Many of the scenarios would also make diets healthier and lead to reduction in diseases like diabetes, heart disease and cancer. Low income people and people of color suffer most from these illnesses due to lack of access to healthy foods, and are a large and increasing proportion of UC students.

According to Cleveland, "The UC and other higher education institutions can provide unique leadership in integrating climate and food policies, critical for effectively responding to the climate emergency".

SOURCE: [Integrating climate and food policies in higher education: a case study of the University of California](#), by David Arthur Cleveland (Environmental Studies & Dept of Geography, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA 93110-4160, and Jennifer Ayla Jay (Dept of Civil and Environmental Engineering, University of California, Los Angeles, CA 90095). Published on line July 7, 2020 in *Climate Policy*, or email Cleveland for copy.

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