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## THE 'EDUCATING FOR SUSTAINABILITY' PROGRAM AS A TRANSFORMATIVE TOOL IN SCHOOL FEEDING IN SALVADOR, BRAZIL

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## INTRODUCTION

The 2023 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report asserted, with a high degree of confidence, that diets higher in plant-based protein and lower in meat, dairy, and animal products can substantially reduce greenhouse gas emissions. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO), such diets are healthy, sustainable, and promote all dimensions of health and well-being; they are also accessible, affordable, safe, and equitable. Aligning national food policies with the goals of the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is essential to fostering resilient, fair, sustainable and climate-aligned food systems.

Salvador, Brazil, pioneered these efforts through the creation of the *Educating for Sustainability* program—an initiative of the city government in partnership with Humane World for Animals and the *Alimentação Consciente Brasil* (Conscious Eating Brazil) program, supported by Mercy For Animals. The program promotes sustainable eating habits by increasing the diversity of plant-based ingredients in school menus, diversifying protein sources, and incorporating nutritional and environmental education.

## METHODS

The program replaced 20% of animal-based ingredients in school meals with regionally inspired plant-based options in compliance with the National School Feeding Program (PNAE) guidelines. Program implementation included the development of technical recipes and taste testing; educational lectures for teaching staff; hands-on training for kitchen

staff; and the distribution of educational materials to support ongoing nutrition and food education.

## RESULTS

A total of 769 cooks, 179 school principals, and 133 nutritionists were trained. Menu innovations included chickpea stroganoff, soy Bolognese, lentil shepherd's pie, and chayote purée. Particularly successful were the white bean moqueca and vegetable feijoada, which achieved acceptability rates of 91.54% and 90.6%, respectively. This is a remarkable outcome, especially when considering that the standard threshold for validating a new preparation, as established by the Manual for the Application of Acceptability Tests within the PNAE, is 85%.

The initiative has the potential to transition 8.3 million meals to plant-based in 2025, translating to an estimated environmental impact of 75 million liters of water saved (equivalent to 557,000 15-minute showers); 16,000 tons of CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent emissions avoided (equal to 154 million kilometers not driven by car); and the preservation of 4,700 hectares of forest—an area comparable to 4,700 football fields. The initiative supports the implementation of actions 2, 7, and 26 of the city's Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Plan and contributes to five United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

## CONCLUSION

Integrating nutritional and environmental education within schools, combined with promoting plant-based meals, can potentially drive lasting dietary change, reduce the environmental footprint of public food systems and improve public health outcomes. Salvador's initiative offers an innovative guide for other municipalities and provides a powerful mechanism for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and promoting more sustainable food systems.