

ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON VEGETARIANISM AND VEGANISM

PRESENTED BY



Public procurement: Do public authorities have a duty to supply vegan food?

Committee Room 21, Tuesday 16 October 2018

Christina Rees MP, Chair of APPG on Vegetarianism and Veganism opened the meeting and introduced the MPs in attendance, Kerry McCarthy and David Drew.

Nuno M. Alvim, President of the Portuguese Vegetarian Association

- Portuguese campaign achieved a legal requirement for the provision for vegan food in all public authority facilities as standard.
- When looking at this issue we should start by answering the question, in a democratic system you would not expect a one-party rule or one diet system imposed on all. We should try to accommodate the needs of a large group of people even if they are a minority nationally.
- In 2015, the Portuguese Vegetarian Society (PVA) launched a petition and in two months it had gained 10,000 signatures. It was submitted to parliament after one year when it had gained over 15,000 signatures; these were collected electronically through a governmental website. Signatures were collected from Portuguese citizens. Our main methods of campaigning were to use social media to spread the message and gaining media attention.
- In 2015–16 different important players entered the fold; the Ministry of Health published a free booklet demonstrating how a vegan diet is and can be healthy and appropriate for everyone. The booklet demonstrated how to plan vegan meals and cost management.
- The more political backing you have the better; we had one MP who was very committed to the cause. We were summoned to a public hearing with MPs where a dietitian and I made our case to politicians across the political spectrum. We led with civil and human rights, reports and data.
- We did encounter resistance regarding food wastage and budget costs, which seemed excessive. However, we were able to manoeuvre well, if adequate plans are made as to who will eat the food then we can limit food wastage and high costs. In May/June 2017 the law came into force.
- The law states that vegan food has to be served in all public and government institutions as standard. There is one agency or authority that is used to

enforce the law. This agency will be used to help prevent discrimination and to make complaints.

- The campaign was successful because we had the support of a large network and a lot of support from people who decide to be vegan every now and again. In Portugal we only needed 4,000 signatures for a parliamentary discussion and we were proactively campaigning.
- What we got right was to use the wording 'strict vegetarian' because it was more inclusive. This made it easy to gain support from flexitarians and civil rights activists. When campaigning we had to make sure we were attractive to political parties across the spectrum. When addressing parties on the right we found they were amenable when we argued on the grounds of civil/human rights and sustainability, and left the animal rights argument.
- When the bill came up for a vote it was approved without any votes against, but we did have some MPs who abstained.

Amanda Woodvine, Chief Executive, Vegetarian for Life

- V for Life started 10 years ago to help improve the quality of life for the UK's older vegans and vegetarians.
- A common story from UK care homes is that residents with dementia sometimes forget that they are vegetarian/vegan and can sometimes ask for meat. We are only aware of two fully vegetarian care homes in the UK. Therefore it is especially important that care caterers fully understand a vegetarian and vegan diet and lifestyle.
- V for Life currently works with 1,274 care homes around the UK with a good geographical spread. All have pledged to cater well and ethically for older vegans and vegetarians.
- The largest care chain in the UK, HC-One's, client base is predominantly state funded residents. Their 365 care homes offer daily plant-based choices to all residents as standard. Initially there were reservations, but they have reported a 10% increase in the number of residents choosing the plant-based food options.
- In order to cater inclusively for vegans, it is important that wholesalers supplying the sector stock vegan products. Earlier this year, one of the largest wholesalers, Bidfood, launched a vegan food catalogue with over 200 vegan products.
- Vegan friendly wholesalers and supply chains already exist and VfL is working with care home management software providers to make their templates more inclusive to vegans and vegetarians.

Dave Oliver, Head of Catering, Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service

- The prison service provides 85,000 prisoners three meals per day. What we do in the prison service is good. We provide food that encompasses a range of religious, vegetarian and medical diets.

- Generally, prisoners have poor diets, they do not know a lot about food. Whilst vegetarianism is not that popular in prisons, the number of people requesting a vegetarian meal is on the increase.
- Vegan meals are not showcased on the pre-selected menus we offer to inmates; this is because vegan meals can be expensive and we do not want inmates requesting a vegan meal if they don't need one. But we do provide vegan meals for people on request.
- The Vegan Society has provided helpful guidelines that we adhere to.
- At present there are no barriers for vegan prisoners, but we have to be realistic in terms of cost. We only have £2 per prisoner each day.

Mark Banahan, Campaigns and Policy Officer, The Vegan Society

- The Vegan Society has just launched a campaign calling for a change in the law to guarantee vegan food options on every public sector menu. This will mean there is a vegan option available to everyone without people having to make a special request.
- In the last four years the number of vegans has quadrupled to an estimated 600,000 people in 2018.
- We regularly hear from vegans who face challenging situations and we do our best to support them to access food in line with their beliefs. For example, we have heard of instances where a woman in Wales, whilst recovering in hospital, was only able to eat crisps and as a result discharged herself early.
- Veganism is protected internationally under the scope of international human rights provision and vegans are protected in the UK under human rights and equality law. This means service providers have an obligation to provide for vegans and a responsibility under the 2010 Equality Act to avoid any discrimination on the grounds of veganism.
- Go Vegan Scotland published results from a survey on vegan provision in the public sector in Scotland earlier this year. When the results were presented to the Scottish government they acknowledged that whilst veganism is a moral conviction, it is the responsibility of individual institutions to comply with the requirements of the Equality Act.
- Vegan provision around the UK differs greatly. Some local authorities such as Brighton and Hove Council have taken it upon themselves to increase vegan provision in their area. Other institutions have made changes to their menus following being contacted by The Vegan Society. However, we cannot contact every institution individually. A change in legislation is needed to guarantee that vegans needs will be met wherever they live.
- The Vegan Society can provide support to institutions and catering companies looking to increase or adapt their vegan options and we have the services of an in-house dietitian to help ensure they are nutritionally balanced.
- Whilst smaller organisations might worry about the cost implications, we should bear in mind that meat is extremely expensive in comparison to fruit,

vegetables, pulses and grains. A lot of organisations already provide vegetarian options; if these could be tweaked they could be made available to vegans.

Amy Odene, Campaigns Manager, ProVeg UK

- ProVeg is an international food awareness organisation that aims to encourage people to choose more plant-based options. In June this year we launched School Plates, a programme designed to support local councils, schools and caterers to make five small menu changes to make a difference to pupils, the planet and save money.
- As part of our research for the school plates programme, we found that just under 100% of schools across the UK regularly provide some form of processed red meat. As part of our programme we ask that schools to remove this processed red meat from the menu.
- We were extremely disappointed to read the latest statement from Climate Minister Claire Perry who stated that she believes: “It is not the Government’s job to advise on diet”. Friends of the Earth described her comments as a “dereliction of duty” and we agree.
- We are grateful to be working alongside forward thinking local authorities and schools who are pushing their personal preferences to one side for the sake of future generations.
- When approaching local authorities, a primary driver is stating that plant-based foods are cheaper to produce than animal-based products. By adopting a more plant-based diet we can help to ease the burden on already stretched school and council budgets.

Questions:

Kerry McCarthy MP stated that having unanimous support would be difficult to achieve in the UK; we would come up against resistance. Sebastian Dance, an MEP, recently submitted a report to the European Parliament regarding the environment and sustainability but encountered opposition to a line stating changing patterns of how people eat. We have also come up against open hostility at public events. For example, at a World Vegan Day event we were heckled by some MPs.

Nuno Alvim responded by stating that when they were campaigning they led with the civil rights and humanitarian cause, which was more amenable to politicians on the right. He also added that whilst they did not have any opposition they did have some MPs who abstained on the vote.

The floor was then opened up for questions. One member of the audience stated that when Scotland launched ‘Meat-free Mondays’ there was resistance from the agricultural community. The audience member then asked if this happened in Portugal? Nuno responded by saying that while they had resistance they had the backing of dietitians who helped push forward the health argument.

The conversation then moved onto whether we should be moving the argument for vegan provision to our ethical and human duty. It was argued that we should be trying to convince people based on their values, which could resonate across the

political spectrum. Mark Banahan responded by saying that delegates at all three party conferences responded well to them. Nuno also added that the political situation is quite different to the UK at present. Portugal has a centre left coalition in power, which may have helped get the outcome they achieved.

A final question from the audience asked why the ethical treatment and the violence against animals argument is left out. Christina Rees responded by saying that everyone has different reasons for becoming a vegan, therefore we need to develop a collective response. Mark also stated that it is not the most effective way to get the message across to people who do not share the same values. The civil rights argument has a better chance of gaining cross party support.