

# Orange County Sustainable & Equitable Food Procurement Policy Report

by David Rooney, Doctoral Candidate

David\_Rooney@utexas.edu

We surveyed 500 residents of Orange County, California, on their perspectives on a policy that would require local government to purchase more plant-based foods as a way to reduce environmental and public health harms.

## Takeaways:

- Residents of Orange County overwhelmingly support (71.73%) legislation to encourage plant-based food purchasing with taxpayer dollars and believe that Orange County in particular should implement such legislation (74.5%).
- Only 12.9% of residents said that their representatives were doing enough to encourage food sustainability—55.9% believed that their representatives were “definitely not” or “probably not” doing enough in this area.
- The majority (67%) of residents said that they were more likely to vote for candidates who pursue such legislation.

## Background

Industrial animal agriculture is the leading cause of biodiversity loss, creates harmful air and water pollution, and emits a significant amount of greenhouse gas. Recent scientific **evidence** indicates that even if all other sectors became carbon-neutral, emissions from meat and dairy products alone will push us past 2°C of warming. The EAT-Lancet **report** found that meeting the Paris Agreement goals would require substantial shifts toward plant-based diets. The scientific consensus is that shifting from meat and dairy to a more plant-based diet is essential to meeting widely adopted climate commitments, such as the Paris Agreement’s 2°C benchmark, and unlocking a series of health benefits, such as lowered risk of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, and overall mortality from a variety of causes.

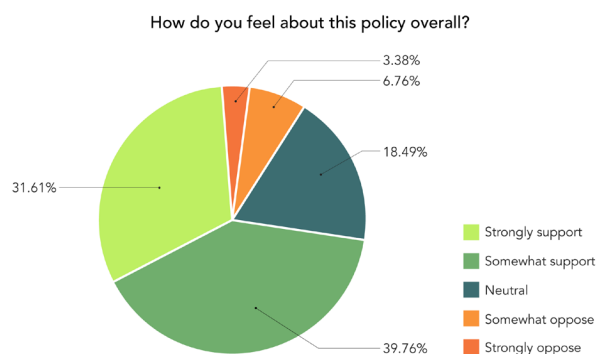
At least 200 cities across California have climate action plans, but Orange County currently does not. Yet a 2020 **survey** of Orange County residents found that 73% believed that climate change is a serious problem, and 63% supported reentering the Paris Agreement after President Trump withdrew from it in 2020. In 2019, the California legislature proposed **Assembly bill 479**, which would have incentivized schools to procure plant-based menu options, but the bill ultimately did not pass.



How do Orange County residents feel about actions to urge city government to procure more sustainable plant-based foods? We asked the 500 respondents to review hypothetical legislation requiring their local government to take these actions:

- Calculate the city's food-related greenhouse gas emissions for one year.
- Increase and prioritize the amount of plant-based food in government facilities, hospitals, higher-learning institutions, and other food settings.
- Prioritize purchasing this food from local BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) farmers where feasible.

When asked how they felt about implementation of this legislation in Orange County, 71.4% of respondents said that they supported it (either strongly or somewhat).



**Figure 1.** Pie chart reflecting respondent support for a hypothetical plant-based food purchasing policy.

Residents were also asked what was most appealing about the proposed legislation. Representative comments include:

The government leading the way and making the change in its own agencies.

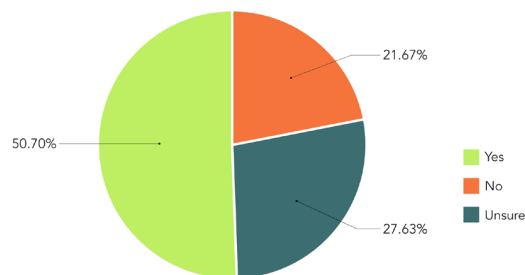
I love the focus on supporting plant-based protein sources as they do more than just lower our carbon footprint, they are generally better for our health.



**Figure 2.** A word cloud of written responses about what residents liked most about the legislation.

When asked whether the government had a responsibility to buy climate-friendly food with taxpayer money, 50.7% answered yes.

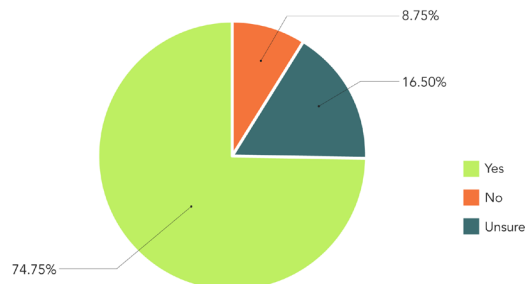
Do you believe that the government has a responsibility to use taxpayer money to purchase food that doesn't contribute to climate change?



**Figure 3.** Pie chart reflecting respondent beliefs about government's responsibility to buy climate-friendly food.

Respondents were then asked whether Orange County should reduce food-related emissions in their jurisdiction—74.5% responded yes.

Should your local government take action to reduce food-related greenhouse gas emissions?



**Figure 4.** Pie chart reflecting respondent views on local government action to reduce food-related emissions.

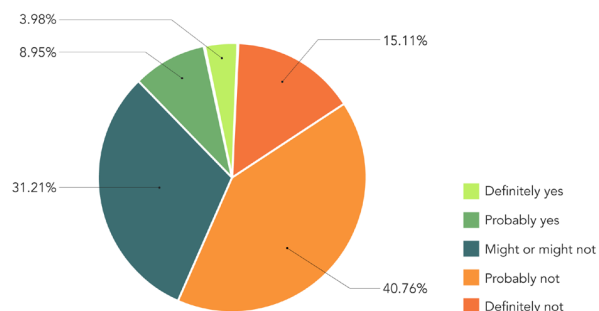




The Orange County residents were also asked whether they felt that their representatives were doing enough on food-related emissions. Only 12.9% responded with either “definitely” or “probably” yes.

The majority (55.9%) responded that their representatives were “definitely not” or “probably not” doing enough in this area.

Do you believe that your representatives are currently doing enough on this issue?

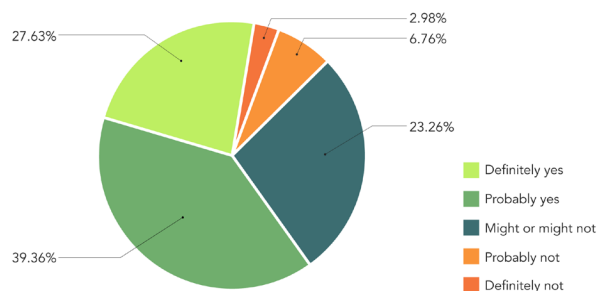


**Figure 5.** Pie chart reflecting respondent beliefs about the adequacy of government efforts to address food-related emissions.

Finally, Orange County residents were asked whether they would be more likely to vote for representatives who pursue climate-friendly food policies.

The majority (67%) answered “definitely” or “probably” yes, and only 9.7% answered that they would not vote for representatives who pursue such policies.

Are you more likely to vote for someone who pursues this kind of climate-friendly food plan?



**Figure 6.** Pie chart reflecting respondent likelihood to vote for representatives who pursue climate-friendly food plans.