



Jose Graziano da Silva & Qu Dongyu
Food and Agriculture Organization
Viale delle Terme di Caracalla
00153 Rome
Italy

18th July 2019

Dear Mr Graziano da Silva & Mr Dongyu,

I am writing to you about World School Milk Day, to ask if you will consider making the celebrations more inclusive by including plant milk. This would not only support the needs of vegans, but benefit people, the planet and animals.

The Vegan Society is an international charity based in the UK and our work includes providing information about human and environmental health, and protecting the rights of vegans.

As you may be aware, vegans hold sincere ethical convictions, and seek to exclude, as far as is possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose. Vegans do not, therefore, drink the milk of any animal. Instead, vegans around the world enjoy fortified plant milks, usually made from nuts, soya or oats.

The sincere convictions of vegans come within the protection of the international right to freedom of conscience. As such, vegans are protected in regional systems of human rights and under various associated equality measures. Vegans in the United Kingdom, for example, benefit from Europe-wide legal principles and are protected under human rights and equality law. As such, the public sector (including schools) is obliged to take all necessary steps to accommodate the needs of vegans to prevent direct or indirect discrimination. This means that vegan parents can request that schools provide fortified plant milk instead of fortified dairy milk for their vegan children. However, vegan children are excluded from celebrating and participating in World School Milk Day activities and, as you will be aware, such exclusion is not aligned with the principle of inclusion and respect for diversity.

The number of vegans in the UK has quadrupled over the 4 years prior to 2018, with the number estimated to be around 600,000 and rising. In the UK 17% of consumers report dairy avoidance in their household. This means that there are many children who are excluded from World School Milk Day activities. Evidence suggests that this trend is being replicated across the world, as more people recognise the benefits of veganism and a plant-based diet.

You will no doubt be aware of the importance of the European Union wide principle of non-discrimination and related initiatives implemented throughout the UK to promote equality, diversity and inclusion. In the context of this high value placed on plurality, it is vital to ensure that all children feel accepted in their school environment. Differences should be celebrated rather than penalised. Promoting equality in schools fosters good relationships in communities, teaches valuable skills with regards to acceptance of diversity and reduces the chance of bullying. Furthermore, treating young people equally aids individual well-being and prevents those with different characteristics from feeling isolated and excluded.

Fortified plant milks are a sustainable choice, requiring far less land and water than dairy milk, whilst also generating fewer greenhouse gas emissions. Oat milk for example requires

less than 10 times the amount of land, 9 times the amount of water and produces on average 3 times less greenhouse gas emissions than cow's milk (*Reducing food's environmental impacts through producers and consumers* - Poore & Nemecek - 2018 - University of Oxford). If we are going to meaningfully tackle the climate emergency, we cannot afford to ignore the environmental benefits that fortified plant milks offer, whilst not compromising on our nutrition.

It is important for everyone to eat calcium rich foods daily and fortified plant milk plays an important role in vegan nutrition. In fact, the UK's Eatwell Guide recognises that fortified plant milk represents a valuable alternative to cow's milk. Calcium content is comparable, and the soya variety is similar to cow's milk in terms of protein content and quality. In addition, the British Dietetic Association and the American Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics acknowledge that well-planned vegan diets can support healthy living during all stages of life.

World School Milk Day could easily be made far more inclusive by allowing fortified plant milks to be permitted in school milk programmes, thereby creating the inclusive social conditions in which everyone can celebrate the value and importance of healthy, fortified milk to human health. This would allow vegan children, as well as those who don't drink milk for other reasons, to take part.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts on the issues outlined above and the importance of incorporating fortified plant milks into World School Milk Day.

Yours sincerely,



George Gill
Chief Executive Officer
The Vegan Society