

McDonald's Australia Head Office
21–29 Central Ave
THORNLEIGH NSW 2120

16 October 2023

Dear McDonald's Australia,

I am writing to you on behalf of RePlanet Australia. RePlanet is an international alliance of environmental organisations that strive for science-based solutions to the climate and ecological crisis, and the elimination of poverty.

As a popular multinational fast-food company, McDonald's Corporation has the power to make purchasing and branding decisions that contribute to the wellbeing of customers and the environment. The McDonald's website administers an understanding of this responsibility, stating a commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to climate change. McDonald's has changed in response to environmental campaigns in the past by removing plastic straws and attempting to reduce the impact of deforestation associated with its supply chains.

The Demand

We are calling on McDonald's Australia to offer a plant-based menu nationwide. Meeting this demand will show McDonalds' commitment to reducing its environmental impact and giving customers an accessible way to reduce their meat and animal product consumption.

This letter marks the start of a campaign that will continue to demand McDonald's Australia offers a plant-based menu. This campaign is not aimed at inciting guilt, but rather at encouraging a major food outlet to give customers more choice and more control over what they eat.

There is plenty of space on the McDonald's menu for Australians to choose alternatives to some of the reported 30 million kg of beef, 17 million kg of chicken, 85 million eggs, 9 million litres of milk, and 7 million kg of cheese sold each year.

The Environment

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Animal agriculture is a contentious environmental issue, and one of the world's most polluting industries^[1]. Livestock are responsible for approximately 70% of greenhouse gas emissions produced by the agricultural industry in Australia^[2]. Much of this contribution is methane, which has a much higher global warming

¹ Smith P, Reay D & Smith J (2021). Agricultural methane emissions and the potential for mitigation. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences*, 379(2210), 20200451.

² Panchasara H, Samrat NH & Islam N (2021). Greenhouse gas emissions trends and mitigation measures in Australian Agriculture Sector—A Review. *Agriculture*, 11(2), 85.

potential than carbon dioxide and is the second most important greenhouse gas requiring urgent mitigation^[3].

Ground and Water Contamination

Livestock farming produces large quantities of animal waste, which deposits nitrogen, phosphorus, faecal microbes and other pollutants into water systems^[4]. Furthermore, livestock agriculture is water-intensive compared to crop production — not only do the livestock require water for consumption, but so does their feed^[5]. The water use and water pollution associated with animal farming threatens our water security on this dry continent.

Land Over-use Threatens Biodiversity

As your website indicates a desire to reduce deforestation associated with your brand, you must be aware of the significant land clearing driven by livestock expansion and the damage this causes to the climate and biodiversity. Australia hosts an extraordinary number of unique organisms, fostering some of the most biodiverse ecosystems on the planet, yet we have persistently high levels of land clearing^[6]. About 48% of Australia is already used for grazing^[7]. Giving even more land to animal agriculture stands to send more species extinct.

With world population expected to rise to 10 billion this century, it is vital that the food sector improves efficiency to increase production, whilst using less resources and mitigating pollution. With so many environmentally destructive factors, no management techniques can plausibly make the expansion of animal agriculture sustainable^[8]. Plant-based diets contribute less to greenhouse gas emissions, deforestation, ocean acidification, and biodiversity loss^[9]. As the largest fast-food corporation on the planet, you have a duty to acknowledge this, and a responsibility to act accordingly.

Health

Dietary Contribution to Individual Health

Not only do plant-based diets reduce the environmental impact of our food system; they are also associated with a lower risk of chronic diseases, such as diabetes, stroke, heart disease, chronic lung disease, and various cancers^{[10][11]}. According to the World Health Organisation, these conditions are responsible for 74% of deaths worldwide^[12].

³ Jackson RB et al. (2021). Atmospheric methane removal: A research agenda. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences*, 379(2210), 20200454.

⁴ Li, Y., Wang, M., Chen, X., Cui, S., Hofstra, N., Kroeze, C., Ma, L., Xu, W., Zhang, Q., Zhang, F., & Strokal, M. (2022). Multi-pollutant assessment of river pollution from livestock production worldwide. *Water Research*, 209, 117906.

⁵ Ran Y et al. (2016). Assessing water resource use in livestock production: A review of Methods. *Livestock Science*, 187, 68–79.

⁶ Heagney EC, Falster DS & Kovač M (2021). Land clearing in south-eastern Australia: Drivers, policy effects and implications for the future. *Land Use Policy*, 102(1052430).

⁷ ABARES 2022, Land use of Australia 2010–11 to 2015–16, 250 m, Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences, Canberra, September, CC BY 4.0. DOI: 10.25814/7ygw-4d64

⁸ Willett W et al. (2019). Food in the Anthropocene: the EAT–Lancet Commission on healthy diets from sustainable food systems. *The Lancet*, 393(10170), pp447–492

⁹ Takacs B et al. (2022) Comparison of environmental impacts of individual meals - does it really make a difference to choose plant-based meals instead of meat-based ones?, *Journal of Cleaner Production* 379(134782).

¹⁰ Chung MG, Li Y & Liu J (2021). Global Red and processed Meat Trade and non-communicable diseases. *BMJ Global Health*, 6(11).

¹¹ Marrone G et al. (2021). Vegan diet health benefits in metabolic syndrome. *Nutrients*, 13(3), 817.

¹² World Health Organization. (2023, 13 September). Fact sheet: *Noncommunicable Diseases*. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/noncommunicable-diseases>

Zoonotic Diseases

We are seeing a rise in zoonotic diseases (diseases transmitted from animals to humans), due to either land clearing to extend grazing land, or the intensification of animal agriculture which compacts animals and their waste into small spaces^[13]. By providing plant-based alternatives, you can aid the health of customers not just directly, but also indirectly by reducing environmental pollution and by reducing the risk of zoonotic disease emergence.

Complete Nutrition Without Animals

Plant-based foods can provide a nutritionally complete diet (so long as vitamin B12, which can be produced without animals, is included). Food technology is allowing for the development of substitutes for animal-based proteins at an unprecedented rate. Research and development on alternative proteins — including insects, algae, plant-based sources, and cellular agriculture — is not new, but is increasing in relevance as we think to the future of food^[14].

Economics

The present risk

The current system of food production is unsustainable and will be forced into radical shifts or reinvention if it does not proactively and fundamentally change. As land and water become depleted, economic returns are diminished and extraction intensifies. In the pursuit of continued profit, this cycle escalates until unforeseen consequences force an unplanned exit, disadvantaging both business and consumer^[15].

Opportunity for growth

In the past decade, western countries have seen record rates of transition to plant-based diets. A lifestyle once stigmatised by the mainstream has become acceptable and even praised^[16]. Whilst strict vegans are small in number, more Australians than ever are buying plant-based products and/or eating less meat, and this number is projected to increase. Surveys suggest that approximately 35% of Australians are trying to eat less red meat^[17] and 42% eat less meat than they used to, or no meat at all^[18]. The Australian market for non-dairy milk substitutes is projected to grow twice as fast as the egg and dairy industry^{[19][20]}.

Competitors and International Trends

The growth of the plant-based market and the need for sustainable business transitions, given the climate and ecological crisis, should not be ignored.

Your competitors and European counterparts are acting on these trends. Fast food favourites Domino's, Subway, Hungry Jacks, Pizza Hut, Nando's, Grill'd, and Guzman y Gomez all offer plant-based menu options

¹³ Hayek MN (2022). The infectious disease trap of Animal Agriculture. *Science Advances*, 8(44).

¹⁴ Tso R, Lim AJ & Forde CG (2020). A critical appraisal of the evidence supporting consumer motivations for alternative proteins. *Foods*, 10(1), 24.

¹⁵ Guo J et al. (2020). Leveraging industrial-technological innovation to achieve sustainable development: A systems thinking perspective. *PLOS ONE*, 15(12).

¹⁶ Gheihman N (2021). Veganism as a lifestyle movement. *Sociology Compass*, 15(5).

¹⁷ Vanderlee L et al. (2022). Meat-reduced dietary practices and efforts in 5 countries: Analysis of cross-sectional surveys in 2018 and 2019. *The Journal of Nutrition*, 152.

¹⁸ Statista Research Department (2023, January 3). 'Australia: Share of people avoiding or reducing meat consumption'. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1232881/australia-share-of-people-avoiding-or-reducing-meat-consumption>

¹⁹ Statista. Dairy Products & Eggs - Australia: Market forecast. <https://www.statista.com/outlook/cmo/food/dairy-products-eggs/australia> (accessed 29 September 2023)

²⁰ Statista. Milk substitutes - Australia: Market forecast. <https://www.statista.com/outlook/cmo/food/dairy-products-eggs/milk-substitutes/australia> (accessed 29 September 2023)

across Australia. In other countries, McDonald's offers a McPlant burger, Vegetable Deluxe burger, McPlant nuggets, Veggie Dippers, and a Veggie Wrap.

Quality and Variety

For plant-based menu items to succeed, the additions must be of the same quality as existing menu items. Vegans, vegetarians, flexitarians, and meat-eaters already enjoy a range of plant-based foods. Therefore, an inferior plant-based offering will likely be poorly received.

If only a single plant-based burger is added to the menu, the offering would already be behind the times, whereas plant-based breakfast options, nuggets, more than one type of burger or wrap, and a vegan McFlurry or milkshake would put McDonald's ahead of its competitors. We urge that you don't just tick the boxes, but work with experts to ensure that your new menu additions are genuine, sustainably sourced, and delicious.

Conclusion

The climate and biodiversity crisis is upon us and the current system of endless growth of unsustainable industries must be deserted before resource depletion leads to sudden collapse. If McDonald's fails to recognise this in advance, it will fall vulnerable to social backlash as people search for justice from the corporations that played crucial roles in fuelling destructive industries like animal agriculture.

McDonald's markets itself as a place that brings people together, but it cannot live up to this ideal while excluding vegans and vegetarians from enjoying a full meal in its restaurants. There is no time to wait — a plethora of plant-based foods are available now and McDonald's Australia is already behind its local competitors and international counterparts.

Ash Geraghty

[head campaigner] 15/10/23

