PROGRAM BRIEF — DEMAND SIDE

100 Million Meals

PROGRAM	100 Million Meals
PROGRAM STATUS	In development — pilot design; no pilot has run
THE NUMBER	100,000,000 meals is a long-term target, not a forecast
VERIFIED MEALS TO DATE	None
PUBLISHED	August 2026, at altruismlab.com/resources

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

100 Million Meals is the Lab's demand-side program. Its premise: the fastest honest way to change what large numbers of people eat is not to persuade them one by one, but to change the institutional decisions — contracts, menus, defaults — that determine what they are served. This brief defines the long-term target, the pilot design under development, the measurement rules, and the uncertainties.

01

Change the decision, not the diner

Most food-choice interventions target individuals: labels, campaigns, appeals. The evidence for durable individual behavior change at scale is mixed at best, and the cost per changed meal is high. But most meals served outside the home are not chosen from scratch by the person eating them — they are shaped by an institutional decision made upstream: a procurement contract, a default menu, a cafeteria rotation, a catering standard.

Those upstream decisions are few in number, made by identifiable people, and renewed on schedules. A single procurement decision can shift more meals in a year than an individual-persuasion campaign reaches in its lifetime. That asymmetry is the program's entire premise.

02

The target — and what it is not

The program's long-term target is **one hundred million meals** shifted toward higher-welfare, plant-forward sourcing through institutional procurement change.

> CLAIM BOUNDARY
>
> 100,000,000 is a target, not a forecast, projection, or promise. It has no timeline attached and no probability estimate behind it. The number of meals verified as transitioned to date is **none**. The target exists to size the ambition and to force the measurement question — what would it take to count a shifted meal honestly? — from day one.

Why state a target at all?

Because vague ambition is unaccountable. A stated number makes underperformance visible and forces the Lab to define its unit of count publicly before any result exists. The risk of stating it is that readers mistake it for a claim — which is why every appearance of the number in Lab materials carries the label and the "verified to date: none" line alongside it.

03

Theory of change

The causal chain the program intends to operate on, with the claim boundary marked honestly:

01 Identify institutions whose procurement decisions govern large meal volumes.

02 Engage the actual decision-makers — food-service directors, procurement officers, caterers.

03 Design menu and sourcing changes that survive cost, logistics, and satisfaction constraints.

04 Secure the procurement change in contract or standard, not as a one-off event.

05 **Meals shifted** — the unit the program counts and the only step it will claim.

06 Downstream welfare effects — demand signals to suppliers, norm change. These are theory, not count.

Steps beyond "meals shifted" are the reason the program exists, but they are not what it will claim credit for. The countable unit is the shifted meal, conservatively defined.

04

The pilot design under development

Four elements are being designed before any institutional engagement begins:

- **Institution selection.** Criteria for the first pilot partners: meal volume governed per decision, decision-cycle timing, data access sufficient for honest counting, and a champion inside the institution.
- **The offer.** What the Lab actually brings a food-service operation: menu engineering, sourcing pathways, cost modeling, and measurement infrastructure — value the institution wants, not a favor it grants.
- **The counting rule.** The precise, pre-registered definition of one shifted meal — baseline period, substitution standard, and the exclusions that prevent double counting. Published before the first count, in the measurement framework's terms.
- **Durability.** How a change survives staff turnover and contract renewal: standards written into procurement documents rather than dependent on individual goodwill.

05

What would be measured

All entries are at the **Planned** tier of the Lab's evidence ladder — published in advance so results cannot be defined after the fact.

METRIC	DEFINITION SKETCH	TIER
Meals shifted	Meals meeting the pre-registered substitution standard versus institutional baseline, conservatively counted	Planned
Durability	Whether the shift survives contract renewal and staff turnover, measured across cycles	Planned
Cost per shifted meal	Fully loaded program cost divided by verified shifted meals	Planned
Satisfaction & uptake	Diner-facing measures sufficient to detect backlash or substitution failure	Planned
Supplier response	Qualitative record of sourcing-side changes attributable to the procurement shift	Planned

06

Key uncertainties

- Institutional willingness may be thinner than the premise assumes once cost and logistics bind.
- Shifted meals may not stay shifted — reversion at contract renewal could erase early counts.
- The counting rule may prove too strict to show progress or too loose to be credible; calibrating it is itself a research problem.
- Cost per shifted meal may be uncompetitive against other welfare interventions once honestly loaded.

07

Milestones

MILESTONE	STATUS
Program brief published (this document)	Published — August 2026
Pilot design: selection criteria, offer, counting rule, durability plan	In development
First institutional pilot with pre-registered counting	Target — contingent on design and partner fit
100,000,000 meals shifted	Long-term target — verified to date: none

08

Ways to engage

- **Pilot partnership.** Institutions that serve meals at scale — campuses, hospital systems, corporate food service, municipal programs — can shape the pilot design now, before it hardens.
- **Fund the design phase.** The bounded current need is pilot design and measurement infrastructure. Contributions are not tax-deductible.
- **Critique the premise.** If institutional procurement is the wrong lever, the Lab wants that argument in writing before the pilot, not after.

All routes begin at **altruismlab.com/contact**.

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