

Starbucks Spoof Adds “Dietary Racism” to National Lexicon

LOS ANGELES, Calif., December 15, 2021 – A prank targeting Starbucks last week raised the issue of dietary racism—yet many lactose-lovers seemed resistant to accept the existence of systemic, structural inequities surrounding food choices.

[Switch4Good](#)—a nonprofit championing the benefits of going dairy-free, together with [the Yes Men](#)—issued a mock press release announcing Starbucks was reversing years of dietary racism by eliminating its upcharge on non-dairy milk due to the prevalence of lactose intolerance in BIPOC communities.

Major media were fooled, yet many questioned the notion that dairy as a default amounted to dietary racism, and in response, Switch4Good released a video “explainer:” <https://vimeo.com/654231842/08d0af47b4>.

“Charging extra for non-dairy milk is indeed a form of dietary racism because up to 95 percent of BIPOC individuals are lactose intolerant, versus only 15 percent of white people,” said Switch4Good executive director Dotsie Bausch. “When people of color are disproportionately and unjustly penalized, it constitutes racism. As we said in our spoof video, plant-based milk is not a luxury that should be taxed, it’s a necessity.”

Up to 80% of Black and Latinx people, up to 95% of Asians, and more than 80% of Indigenous Americans cannot digest dairy, yet this is far from the only example of dietary racism.

Forced milk in public schools:

The National School Lunch Program requires schools to give milk to every child—unless families provide a doctor’s note—and makes no exceptions for lactose intolerance. If 75% of white children were made sick by dairy, it would be pulled from the school lunch program immediately.

Lack of representation:

There was not one person of color on the 2020-2025 U.S. Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee, and representation on past committees has been minimal. Whites setting these guidelines recommend three servings of dairy per day.

Food deserts limit food choices:

BIPOC and low-income neighborhoods are more likely to lack access to fresh healthy foods, and/or suffer from an oversupply of fast food and liquor/convenience stores.

Lack of food stores:

White neighborhoods have an average of [four times as many supermarkets](#) as predominantly Black neighborhoods, and food stores in Black communities are usually smaller, with less selection.

“Dietary racism clearly parallels environmental racism, and often creates financial barriers that exclude people from making healthier food choices,” said Milton Mills, MD, an urgent care physician in Washington DC who has published several research journal articles addressing racial bias in federal nutrition policy. “It is galling that this issue would be dismissed as performative ‘wokeness,’ when dietary racism impacts potentially every person of color in America.”

Starbucks has ignored requests from BIPOC customers to cancel the added charge for plant-based milk, and Switch4Good intends to continue its pressure.

Switch4Good testified on Capitol Hill in 2019 about the health impact of dairy, and petitioned the USDA to remove it from the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA). Along with other NGOs, it succeeded in getting soy milk recognized as nutritionally equivalent to dairy in the DGA.

Its multidisciplinary and multicultural coalition that includes BIPOC clinicians, dietitians, activists, athletes, and other thought leaders is working to enact fairer, healthier nutrition policies such as ensuring schools have access to, and reimbursement for, soy milk.

About Switch4Good

Switch4Good is a nonprofit organization aimed at raising awareness about the problems associated with consuming dairy and helping people make the switch to living dairy free. The organization provides information about how dairy impacts the environment, health, fitness, food justice and animals. For more information about Dotsie Bausch, the organization, or how to make the switch to a dairy-free diet, please visit:

<https://switch4good.org>.

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