

January 23, 2022

Open Letter to Starbucks

Dear CEO Kevin R. Johnson and Global Chief Inclusion & Diversity Officer Dennis Brockman:

On behalf of all people who are lactose intolerant and made sick by dairy, or who support social and environmental justice across the globe, [Switch4Good loudly applauds Starbucks' recent decision to eliminate the extra charge for non-dairy beverages in the U.K.](#) Thank you!

This was a bold yet very smart move. You're doing the right thing for your customers and the planet, considering the severe and unsustainable impact of dairy farming.¹ Large-scale dairy production pollutes waterways, increases greenhouse gas emissions, and destroys local ecosystems all over the world. If you compare the production of oat milk to cow's milk, it takes 80% less land and 90% less water with less than one-third of the CO₂ emissions.²

Any move to make non-animal food alternatives more accessible is terrific. It also better reflects Starbucks' stated values and those of your constituents. Just imagine the goodwill, boost to your brand, increased relevance and moral high ground Starbucks could claim if you announced a similar policy in the United States. Or everywhere you do business. In fact, this could be part of a broader call to action to other global food brands. ***That is true leadership.***

Globally, more than 90% of people of color are lactose intolerant,³ meaning they cannot digest dairy. In the U.S., 36% of all people are lactose intolerant. Therefore, the cow's milk in Starbucks' beverages makes 1 in 3 Americans sick—mostly people of color.⁴

Bottom line: people of color are disproportionately and unjustly penalized by Starbucks' minimum 70-cent upcharge (in the U.S.) for drinks made with non-dairy milk. When most people of color have to pay extra—or make themselves sick by consuming regular dairy milk—charging them more for non-dairy milk is a form of dietary racism. Even if it's unintentional racism.

Indeed, noted nutrition and health policy expert Dr. Milton Mills says that “dietary racism clearly parallels environmental racism, and often creates financial barriers that exclude people from making healthier food choices. Dietary racism impacts potentially every person of color in America.”

Starbucks is a good company because you try to make things right. After the 2018 fiasco in a Philadelphia Starbucks with Rashon Nelson and Donte Robinson, you stepped up, declared the incident “reprehensible,” and mandated meaningful interventions like the May 29, all-hands racial bias training. And your follow-through spoke even louder than your eloquent and heartfelt words. Eliminating the non-dairy surcharge throughout your global network of stores is ***another bold act***, one that will forever be heralded, respected, greatly appreciated, and stand as a compelling example for other companies to follow.

Of course, doing the right thing is always worth it, despite incremental and affordable cost. This generous and easily achievable policy would help to protect your customers' health, promote dietary justice, support your commitment to sustainability, and create massive and invaluable goodwill among your customers and constituents.

Will you build on your brave, smart move in the U.K. by eliminating the surcharge in ALL Starbucks stores?

We wait, hope, and thank you for listening.

Sincerely,

Dotsie Bausch, **U.S. Olympic Medalist and Founder of Switch4Good**
Milton Mills, MD, **Critical Care Physician and Racial Justice Speaker**
Rachael Adams, **U.S. Olympic Medalist and Social Justice Warrior**
Kevin Tillman, **Decolonize Project**
Sailesh Rao, **Founder, Climate Healers**
Jo St. George, **Director, Women of Color for Equal Justice**
Louie Psihoyos, **Academy Award Winning Director, The Cove**
Neal Barnard MD, **Founder, Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine**
Phil Keoghan, **Television Host, The Amazing Race**
Marc Bekoff, **NYT Best-Selling Author, The Emotional Lives of Animals**
Rip Esselstyn, **#1 NYT Author, Founder of PlantStrong**

Gene Baur, **Time Magazine's "The Conscience of the Food Movement"**
Kathy Freston, **#1 NYT Best-Selling Author, Quantum Wellness**
Bob LeRoy, **Founder, Prevention of Disease.org**
James Marin, RD, EN
Alan N. Desmond, MD, **Gastroenterologist, U.K. NHS**
Will Bulsiewicz, MD, **Gastroenterologist**
Judy Brangman, MD, DipABLM
Angie Sadeghi MD, **Gastroenterologist**
Monica Aggarwal, MD, **Cardiologist**
Susan Levin, RD, EN, **Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine**
Matthew Glover, **Managing Director, Veg Capital**



**Justice has been
served in the U.K.**

**But what about
the 9,000
Starbucks
stores in
the U.S.A.?**

1. UN Making Peace With Nature (2021)
2. Poore et al. Science DOI: 10.1126/science.aag0216 (2018)
3. NIH "What is lactose intolerance?" (2018)
4. NIH "How common is lactose malabsorption?" (2018)