OPINION

Thailand's kitchens can serve up climate action

WRITER: PONGSAGORN SATJIPANON

PUBLISHED: 19 NOV 2026



Family members are pictured on a sustainable organic farm in Thung Chang district, Nan province, in this file photo taken on Dec 30, 2019. Pinyo Jindachart

As world leaders gather for COP31, one frequently overlooked climate issue in Thailand merits greater attention: how businesses change the way food is produced, served, and consumed.

The latest COP meeting belatedly places sustainable, climate-resilient food systems among its priorities. For food service and hospitality companies in Thailand, this sharpened sense of focus offers a clear opportunity to act.

Discussions at the recent Bangkok Climate Action Week in October offered several timely lessons. Firstly, on how Thailand can translate climate ambition into meaningful action. Secondly, as the event coincided with the Thai capital's worst floods in 15 years, it raised questions about what happens when action is insufficient.

Policymakers, businesses, civil society, and climate advocates at the event highlighted that food systems are both vulnerable to climate change and contributors to the problem. Agriculture, land use, and food production place considerable pressure on natural resources and generate substantial greenhouse gas emissions.

Panellists from the Good Food Institute APAC, ProVeg International, Thai Climate Justice for All, and Asia Research & Engagement (ARE) agreed that addressing these challenges requires looking beyond how food is produced to consider how businesses influence what consumers eat.

One message stood out: the transition towards more sustainable diets cannot depend on individual consumers. Businesses play a key role in making sustainable food choices accessible, affordable and appealing.

The Kitchen Evolves

Thailand has long positioned itself as the "Kitchen of the World", supported by its strength in agriculture, renowned cuisine, and successful hospitality industry. Maintaining this status requires rethinking how it produces and consumes protein.

ARE's recent research -- "Kitchen of the Future: The Economic and Environmental Benefits of Protein Diversification in Thailand" -- demonstrates the scale of this opportunity.

Shifting 50% of Thailand's meat and seafood production towards plant-based protein sources by 2050 could reduce annual greenhouse gas emissions by 35.5 million tonnes of CO_2 equivalent, spare approximately 2.17 million hectares of land, and potentially generate an additional cumulative 1.3 trillion baht (US$38.4 billion) in economic value by 2050.

For Thailand, protein diversification represents an opportunity to strengthen food-system resilience, develop new markets for farmers, and reinforce the country's position as a regional food leader.

It's also consistent with COP31's emphasis on a just transition.

Plant-Rich Dining

Climate Action Week showed growing recognition that sustainable food choices must move into everyday dining. Through their menus and marketing, hotels, restaurants, hospitals, and catering providers can influence consumer decisions by making plant-rich meals more visible, accessible, affordable, and appealing.

Some Thai hotels are already showing what is feasible. Bangkok Marriott Marquis Queen's Park committed in 2023 to shift 20% of menu options across six dining venues towards plant-based proteins within two years. ibis Bangkok IMPACT has introduced its Groove & Greens Café, where plant-based items account for more than half of the menu. Accor's Novotel brand targets at least 25% plant-forward menu options globally by the end of this year. Half of its hotels achieved that goal by the end of 2025.

ARE's case studies show measurable results elsewhere. IKEA Thailand reported that 50% of its restaurant main menu items were plant-based in 2025, including its popular plant balls, which are priced no higher than their meat equivalents and with a significantly lower carbon footprint. Guckenheimer, a US-based corporate caterer, reported that 56% of its meals were plant-based in 2025, while NYC Health + Hospitals reported a 36% reduction in food-related carbon emissions with its

plant-based meal programme, alongside 98% patient satisfaction and cost savings of US$0.59 per meal.

Delivering benefits at scale

These examples demonstrate how plant-rich dining can deliver environmental and business benefits at scale.

To accelerate this transition, Thailand's hospitality and foodservice businesses must move towards meaningful actions that reduce their Scope 3 food footprints. With Thailand introducing IFRS S1- and S2-aligned sustainability disclosure requirements for SET-listed companies in phases from 2027, businesses have an opportunity to lead through publicly disclosed policies, measurable targets, and transparent progress reporting that demonstrate tangible improvements in business practices, rather than simply reporting on sustainability ambitions.

No single organisation can transform the food system. Climate Action Week showcased how collaboration among businesses, policymakers, culinary institutions, suppliers, and civil society organisations can overcome barriers and create opportunities for the wider food industry.

The next step is to translate collaboration into broader corporate commitments and measurable action, particularly across Thailand's hospitality and other foodservice sectors.

For Thailand to remain the Kitchen of the World, it needs a kitchen fit for the future.

Pongsagorn Satjipanon is Thailand Sustainable Food Systems Manager at ARE Thailand. Asia Research & Engagement (ARE) works with investors and businesses across Asia to advance sustainable and responsible food systems, including protein diversification.