

Can we eat our way to a healthier future?

October 18 2016, by Juliette Wittich

What we are putting in our mouths and on our plates is globally gaining recognition as the key to unlocking a healthier, more sustainable, and fairer future. What we eat, how we're eating it and the journey that it takes from production to consumption is leaving a mark on our bodies and our planet.

It is estimated that up to [31% of greenhouse gas emissions are caused by our food systems](#) — a greater impact than transport systems for sea, land and air combined. As Australians, we are responsible for a [whopping 1.4%](#) of this, despite having a population of just 24 million people. In September, we received the uncomfortable news that we may have surpassed [the 400 parts per million threshold](#). [A threshold that was previously thought impossible, achieved in our lifetime.](#)

Despite the fact that nearly one in three mouthfuls of food is wasted, new modelling from the University of New South Wales suggests [one in three Australian adults are predicted to be Obese by 2025](#). Meanwhile, [one in nine of our global neighbours](#) will remain subject to hunger and malnutrition. With such an imbalanced picture, it's clear that we need to start sourcing solutions, and enacting change.

In 2015, The United Nations mapped a new pathway towards development and prosperity by 2030 with their Sustainable Development Goals. Of these 17 global goals, [it is estimated that 12 to 15 are reliant on a global appetite for addressing inequities in our food system.](#)

If we are to build a better food system, people from a variety of

backgrounds must have a seat at the table. This has been difficult for high-level policymakers to achieve, ironically paradoxical to the universality of food.

Food is human. It is [embedded in our social and cultural systems](#). It is often the focal-point of our communal experiences and ceremonies. Yet when we speak about how much needs to change in order for our diets to straddle the parameters of healthful and sustainable, it's rarely as a collective.

#FeastOfIdeas hopes to change this. Throughout October, 200 dinner parties will be hosted around the globe by a diverse range of communities. Academics, policy institutes and civil society will come together over a shared meal.

They will be provided with a guide to cooking seasonally, minimising their waste and reducing their meat intake (three easy steps we can all take to [drastically improve the environmental and physical impact of our diets](#)) and apprentice with the same big questions, tabled by leading voices in food advocacy and action.

Professor Michael Pollan will ask us how we price food equitably to represent its land and human cost. Dr Kevin Strong, founder of the [Dunk the Junk](#) initiative, will ask for strategies to decrease sugar [consumption](#), with careful attention to nations whose public health systems are less equipped to defend against food marketing.

Every solution will be submitted via the campaign hashtag #FeastOfIdeas on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to be collated into a crowdsourced mega-menu for change. This will be presented at the closing dinner party in London, to a guest list that includes Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution, the World Health Organization and the Global Nutrition Report. Through innovative opportunities, workable ideas will

flourish from setting an open table for discussion.

It may seem like a small thing to encourage a few thousand people to discuss food over a meal, but it is an important beginning. If we cannot discuss food as a crucial determinant of physical and environmental health, what hope is there of exploring its more complex relationships?

The [impact of malnutrition on the educational attainment](#) of young women and girls also has crucial implications for our abilities to address gender inequity. The Global North's taste for fresh and canned tuna, has resulted in overfishing in the Pacific that has created both an [economic fallout and a growing crisis of noncommunicable disease](#). The palm oil in that innocuous chocolate bar we rely on to get through the 3 O'clock slump, is [devastating a once thriving tourism industry and displacing native peoples in Borneo](#).

We can't afford to be complacent anymore. By the same token, we shouldn't despair or expect that the solutions to our greatest challenges can only be found in the hallowed halls of our most powerful.

Often, when we approach a multi-faceted "wicked" problem (of which, the intersection of food, climate and health is certainly one), we believe the impetus must be to incite urgent and sweeping change. This ignores the power of humble improvements at a human scale. For instance, for those of us who have the luxury to choose, adjusting what we put on our dinner plates.

With nearly 7.4 billion dinner plates at our tables, the opportunity to adopt small changes that add up to significant solutions is immense.

So grab some friends, set a date, and [sign up to help solve our biggest food-related health and environmental challenges](#) in the most delicious way possible — over a shared, locally-sourced, nourishing meal. There is

a seat for everyone at the #FeastOfIdeas table.

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