

It's not just vehicles and factories, what we eat can pollute the environment

September 6 2022, by Dr. Clare Pettinger



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We've increasingly seen environmental sustainability in news headlines, as governments around the world seek to address the problems of the changing climate. As a result, we are all now more aware of how various

aspects of our societies can have a negative effect on the ecosystem.

But it is not just factories and vehicles pumping out pollutants into the atmosphere that are damaging the environment—modern food systems and indeed the actual food we eat are also important factors.

Striking a balance

According to the Association of U.K. Dietitians (BDA), up to 30% of [global greenhouse gas emissions](#) are connected to food production and agriculture. Current food systems also contribute to soil degradation, waste and the loss of habitats.

With these things in mind, it is important that we try to ensure that our population's health and the state of the environment can be balanced. I passionately believe in creating healthy and sustainable diets and food systems that will benefit ourselves and the planet. We should aim to support healthy, sustainable diets that meets both the needs of the environment and good nutritional health.

What can we do?

Very often people feel that whatever they do to be more sustainable, it is only a drop in the ocean compared with the wider scheme of things. However, we can all do things in our [everyday lives](#) that will help.

For starters, we can cut down on the amount of food we waste. The BDA say 10 million tons of food are wasted in the U.K. every year, with 71% of that figure consisting of household waste. However, with a bit of forethought, it is possible to manage our [food waste](#) more effectively which can also support us being more cost-effective. Using leftovers in our weekly meals and keeping food until the use-by date are just two

ways of cutting down on the amount of food that makes it to the dustbin. Planning your weekly shop and not over-buying items will also reduce the amount of waste.

Supermarkets produce tons of food packaging a year, which is not insignificant by any means. We can reduce this by simple, practical methods, such as reusable containers for storing our lunch when we are at work. Using our own drinks bottle filled with tap water instead of buying bottled drinks will also help cut down on packaging.

Changing diets

Diets and [food systems](#) need to be sustainable and that may result in changing the types of food we eat. For example, reducing [meat consumption](#) and moderating dairy intake are considered ways of supporting the environmental burdens of the food system. For the U.K. environmentally sustainable dietary recommendations, please see [One Blue Dot](#).

Furthermore, genetically modified [crops](#), organically grown crops, meat alternatives and animal fat replacements are all currently being researched to see if they could be important parts of our future diets.

At the same time, the case should be made to the public for changing our diets to help protect the world and its inhabitants, while remaining mindful of culture and traditions. For example, genetically modified produce and insect-based food stuffs have generally not been well-received in the press, despite positive arguments for their environmental importance.

While the science may point one way, it's not enough on its own. Winning hearts and minds may be just as important in the coming years as the research itself.

Provided by University of Plymouth

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