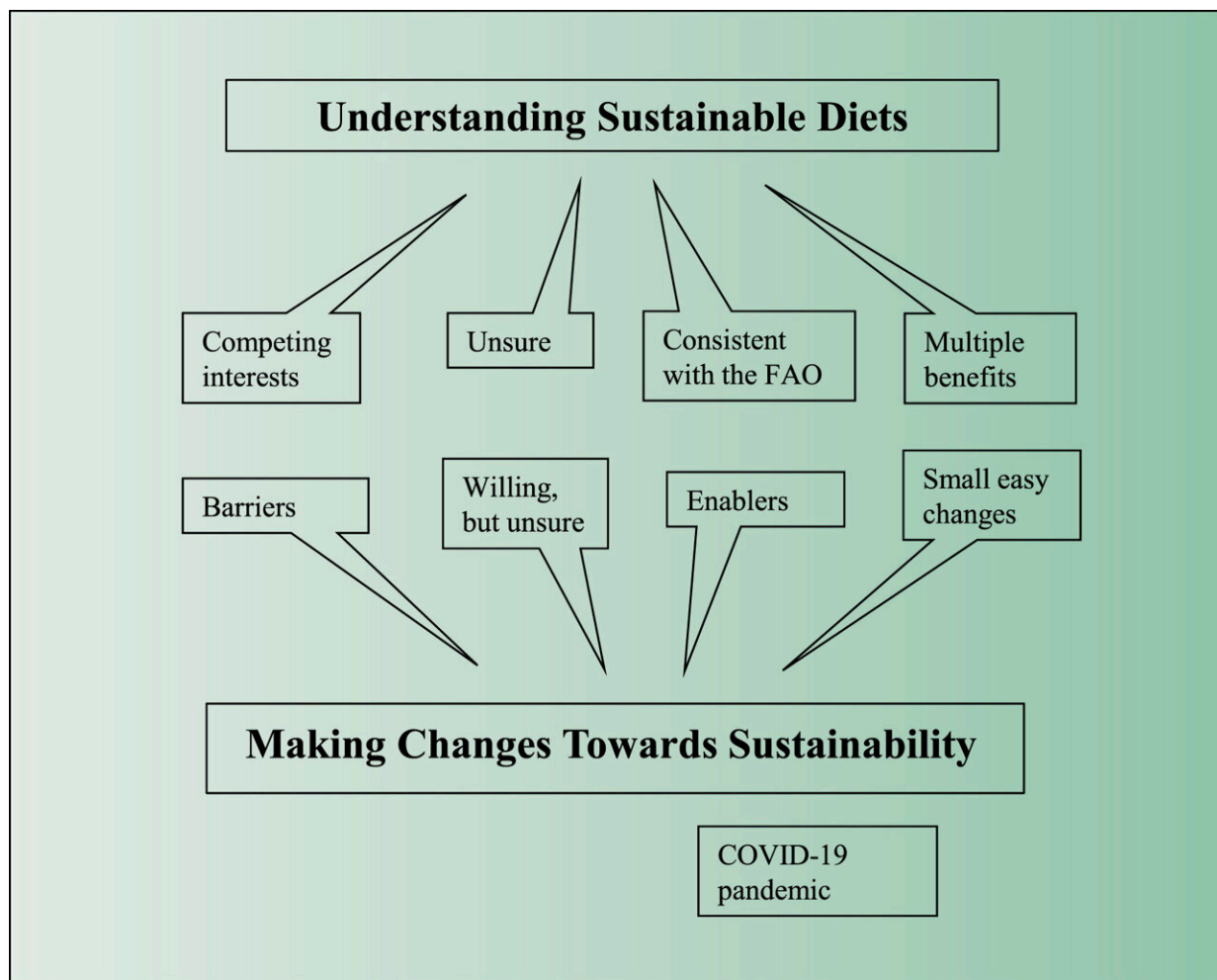


Not everyone is aware that sustainable diets are about helping the planet

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Understanding sustainable diets and making changing towards sustainability: Overview of themes. Credit: *Appetite* (2022). DOI: 10.1016/j.appet.2022.106388

A new study has found that young Brits would be willing to change to a more sustainable diet, but a lack of understanding about what that actually means is preventing many from doing so.

Many people are also uncertain about what changes they should make.

Sustainable diets are defined by the UN as "diets with low environmental impacts which contribute to food and nutrition security and to [healthy life](#) for present and future generations."

Previous research has suggested that 20-30% of environmental impacts in Europe and the UK originate from our diets, including impacts from food production, processing and retail. It is also now widely accepted that the consumption of meat and [animal products](#) typically has a higher environmental impact than plant-based foods.

"When thinking about how to live more sustainably, people seem to understand that this can mean taking fewer flights, using the car less, recycling more, but it seems that not everyone is aware of the difference that changing their diet can make as well," explained Katherine Appleton, Professor of Psychology at Bournemouth University, who led the study.

For this new study, researchers from Bournemouth University interviewed twenty-one mostly [young adults](#) from a range of households and with different cooking responsibilities—from cooking for everyone in the house, to living with others who do all the cooking for them.

They were asked various questions about their understanding of a sustainable diet and their willingness to make changes.

The findings, published in the journal *Appetite*, found that many participants did not know or were very unsure of what a sustainable diet

was, with some not considering the environment or the planet at all.

Participants were unclear what would make their food choices more environmentally sustainable. When it came to making changes to their diet, participants explained that they would be willing to do that to help the environment, but there was significant uncertainty about what changes they should make.

There was particular interest in making small and easy changes—for example, eating less meat but not cutting it out completely and being prepared to pay a little bit more for it, but not significantly more.

The research team recommend that more work needs to be done to raise public awareness of what constitutes a sustainable [diet](#) and how people's food choices can impact the environment and global food security.

"We were surprised by our findings. We had originally intended looking at how we can encourage people to eat more foods such as beans and pulses, but we discovered that people still don't know enough about why this is important, so to talk about increasing the consumption of specific foods is getting too far ahead for many," explained Professor Appleton.

"We need to promote greater awareness and knowledge of how changes to eating habits can go some way to helping the planet, while also offering some suggested changes that are likely to be acceptable and acted upon," she added.

Focusing on likely impact and personal benefit and increasing public availability and accessibility to sustainable diets will be of value, the researchers suggest, but consideration of consumer preferences and abilities will also be needed, the researchers conclude.

More information: B. Whittall et al, Public understanding of

sustainable diets and changes towards sustainability: A qualitative study in a UK population sample, *Appetite* (2022). DOI: [10.1016/j.appet.2022.106388](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2022.106388)

Provided by Bournemouth University

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