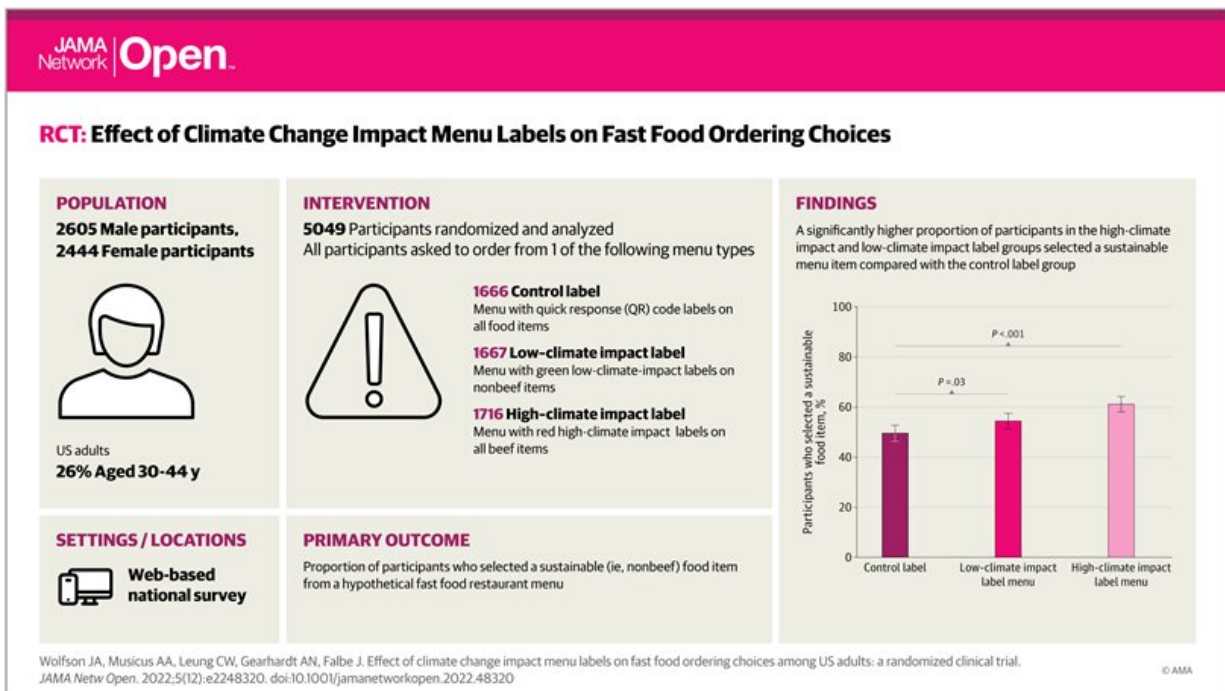


Study shows climate impact labels on food sold in fast food restaurants can change buying habits

December 28 2022, by Bob Yirka



Visual abstract. Effect of climate change–impact menu labels on fast food ordering choices. Credit: *JAMA Network Open* (2022). DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2022.48320

A team of researchers affiliated with multiple institutions in the U.S. has found that placing labels on foods sold at fast food restaurants informing

consumers of the negative impact of the production of such foods on the planet can alter consumer buying habits. In their paper published on *JAMA Network Open*, the group describes conducting an online survey using a fictional restaurant to learn more about consumer food buying choices.

Prior research has found that animal food production is responsible for approximately 14.5% of all [greenhouse gas emissions](#). And many studies have shown that switching to more sustainable food products such as those that are plant-based would greatly reduce emissions.

Unfortunately, consumers have been resistant to change and many wish to continue eating meat.

As one example, approximately 85% of [agricultural land](#) in the U.K. is used to pasture animals or to grow crops to feed them. In this new effort, the researchers looked at a new way to convince consumers to eat more Earth-friendly foods—putting labels on menus next to [food items](#) that bluntly describe the climate impact of choosing that food option.

The researchers began with the idea that part of the problem with getting consumers to switch their food choices is lack of knowledge. Many people, they noted, do not realize that eating red meat, for example, has a much higher negative impact on the planet than eating tofu, with is made from soybeans.

To test the idea, the researchers conducted an [online survey](#) that involved presenting 5,049 participants with menu choices—each chose from a fictional fast-food restaurant. Beside each menu choice, the researchers placed one of three labels that described the menu choice as environmentally sustainable, not sustainable, or having unknown sustainability as a control.

The researchers report that 23.5% more people than the [control group](#)

chose the sustainable menu item compared to just 9.9% for the non-sustainable item. They suggest that consumers would be more willing to choose more environmentally friendly food options if they were given the information they needed to make a well-informed choice.

More information: Julia A. Wolfson et al, Effect of Climate Change Impact Menu Labels on Fast Food Ordering Choices Among US Adults, *JAMA Network Open* (2022). DOI: [10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2022.48320](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2022.48320)

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