

Eating the way we do hurts us and the planet, Canadian study finds

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In an age of abundance and variety in food options, are Canadians eating better than they were half a century ago? According to a recent paper by researchers at McGill University and the International Food Policy

Research Institute, those relying on Canada's food supply for their dietary needs not only face deficiencies in healthier alternatives but also contribute to the disproportionate levels of environmental degradation caused by Canadian agricultural and food distribution policies.

In a study spanning close to 60 years, the researchers delved into the intricacies of Canada's food supply, juxtaposing it against the Canada Food Guide and the globally recognized EAT-Lancet dietary recommendations. This comprehensive analysis sheds light on a significant yet often overlooked aspect of daily life: the correlation between what a country produces and consumes and its consequent impact on health and the environment.

Alarming impacts of imbalanced diets

"One of the study's most striking findings is the evident imbalance in the Canadian food supply. There's a conspicuous overabundance of red meat and sugar, products that have long been associated with various health issues when consumed in excess. Conversely, there's a notable deficiency in healthier alternatives like nuts, legumes, and vegetables," says Vincent Abe-Inge, Ph.D. student in McGill's Department of Bioresource Engineering and lead author of the study.

The researchers are also ringing the alarm on the environmental impacts related to this imbalance. Specifically, the study highlights that animal-based foods, despite constituting a smaller portion of the overall food supply, are responsible for a disproportionate amount of environmental degradation.

This includes higher greenhouse gas emissions, water usage, and land exploitation, underscoring the urgent need for a more sustainable approach to food production and consumption.

Better food supply for a better future

One thing is clear to the researchers: The current state of the Canadian food supply chain has far-reaching implications for human health and our environment. On the health side, the excessive availability of red meat and sugar correlates with rising incidences of obesity, heart disease, and diabetes. From the environmental perspective, the over-reliance on animal-based food production exacerbates climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion.

The study advocates for strategic measures to realign the food supply with dietary recommendations, including the taxation of unhealthy foods to discourage excessive consumption and investments in sustainable food production practices, particularly in plant-based foods. The researchers hope the findings of this study will serve as a clarion call for policymakers, stakeholders in the food industry, and consumers alike.

"There's an urgent need to adopt a holistic approach that not only prioritizes public health but also the [health](#) of our planet. By aligning food supply more closely with recommended [dietary guidelines](#), Canada can pave the way for a healthier, more sustainable future," concludes Vincent Abe-Inge.

The research is [published](#) in the journal *Global Food Security*.

More information: Vincent Abe-Inge et al, Uncovering the gap: Assessing the compliance of the Canadian food availability with dietary recommendations and its impact on the environment, *Global Food Security* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.gfs.2023.100736](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gfs.2023.100736)

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