



EATING GREEN

What would happen if Americans ate a more plant-based diet: more fruits and vegetables, more whole grains and less meat and dairy products?

Eating Green, a new Center for Science in the Public Interest project, promotes a diet that is healthy—for people and for the planet. Changes in the way we eat and the way we farm can both improve public health and protect the environment. The project will advocate for policy changes, educate the public, and conduct research.

Better Health:

- Lower risk of cancer, heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, and obesity
- Fewer illnesses from food-borne diseases from meat, as well as fruits and vegetables contaminated by animal manure
- More effective antibiotics

A Cleaner Environment:

- Less pesticide and fertilizer pollution and less water use from the growing of grains fed to cattle (and other livestock)
- Less manure runoff and air pollution from cattle feedlots and other “factory farms” used to produce meat
- Less air pollution from fertilizer production

Less Harm to Animals and Workers:

- Less crowded, more humane living conditions for livestock
- Less harm to farmworkers

WHAT AMERICANS EAT AFFECTS THE PLANET AND HEALTH:

- The average American eats close to 200 pounds of meat, poultry and fish per year -- up 10% from 1970. More than half of that is red meat, which leads to an increased risk of several cancers.
- Producing feed for cattle, hogs and chickens harms the environment. Livestock consume the vast majority of the corn used in the U.S. Half of the fertilizers and large quantities of pesticides are used to grow corn and other feed grains. But these chemicals run off and harm wildlife; drinking water; and lakes, rivers and streams used for boating, fishing, and swimming. Also, 16 trillion gallons of water a year are used to irrigate feed grains – enough water to meet New York City’s needs for 35 years.
- Much of the meat we eat is produced in factory farms, where thousands of animals are crowded together in unnatural and sometimes cruel conditions. Each year, these facilities generate three times more waste than is produced by the 300 million Americans - enough waste to cover the U.S. in a layer of manure 6 inches thick. This manure pollutes waterways, the air, and drinking water.
- To prevent diseases caused by crowded factory farms conditions, (and for cattle, to prevent illnesses caused by being fed an unnatural diet of feed grains), animals are fed antibiotics. But bacteria that cause food poisoning and possibly other illnesses become resistant to the antibiotics, reducing the effectiveness of these precious drugs in treating human illnesses.
- People who eat five or more servings of fruit or vegetables cut their cancer risk in half as compared to people who eat fewer than two servings a day. A more plant-based diet also lowers the risk of stroke, heart disease, and high blood pressure.

- In children's diets, milk is by far the largest source of artery-clogging saturated fat, providing one-quarter of their intake, even though lowfat and nonfat milk is readily available. One quarter of children ages 5-10 already have high cholesterol, high blood pressure and other risk factors for heart disease. In the last thirty years, Americans are consuming much less whole milk, but are eating twice as much cheese.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

You can take action to protect your health and the environment by eating less meat, more fresh fruits and vegetables, and more whole grains. Switch to lean meat that is produced through environmentally-responsible grazing methods. Eat dairy products that are lowfat (1% or less).

We need to change current policies that heavily subsidize the production of feed grains, reward the production of high fat meat and dairy products, waive taxes for the purchase of fertilizers and pesticides, facilitate the promotion of dairy and meat products, and allow factory farms to pollute the environment. Those policies have been created at the behest of the politically powerful and well-funded corporate beef, pork, poultry, dairy, and feed grain interests and their friends in Congress and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Policy reforms could include:

- Levying taxes based on the fat content of dairy and meat and using some of the revenues to reward farmers to produce lower-fat meat animals, grass-fed beef and lower fat dairy products
- Changing regulations that specify high levels of fat in meat and dairy products
- Reducing or eliminating feed-grain subsidies and creating other measures to reduce production
- Taxing pesticides, fertilizer and antibiotics used in animal and feed-grain production to internalize some of the environmental costs of conventional agriculture
- Requiring that factory farms fully pay for the environmental harm they cause
- Eliminate government involvement in promotion programs for meat and dairy
- Expanding programs that bring more fruits and vegetables to school children and low income populations

A comprehensive, scientific analysis is needed that compares the environmental and health effects of a typical American diet with a vegetarian or vegan diet (and other diets, such as adding fish or grass-fed beef to a largely plant-based diet). The National Academy of Sciences has expressed interest in undertaking this study, but does not have the estimated \$1 million to fund it. CSPI is working to identify funding sources, because of the study's potential to inform decision-makers and the public.

CENTER FOR SCIENCE IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

CSPI has long advocated for diets lower in fatty animal products and higher in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, as well as better health and agriculture policies. CSPI led the effort to win passage of the 1990 Nutrition Labeling and Education Act and other legislative and regulatory measures to promote better nutrition. CSPI also spearheaded the effort to win passage of the organic-labeling section of the 1990 Farm Bill, because of our concerns about overuse of pesticides, fertilizers, and other hallmarks of conventional agriculture. CSPI's campaigns to stem the agricultural misuse of antibiotics and to improve food safety have called attention to major problems with our system of meat production and resulted in policy changes that protect human health.