

Eat for Our Future: Your Climate Diet Questions Answered

Webinar Q&A transcript and answers to some questions submitted in advance.

I'm not sure whether it is more sustainable for example to eat local non-organic apples or organic apples from other parts of the UK or further afield (other countries/continent).

One type of apple over another won't make a huge difference - so no need to worry too much! I would generally say opt for local (particularly at this time of year with all the windfalls), but if you weight pesticides much higher than GHG emissions, opt for organic.

<https://ourworldindata.org/is-organic-agriculture-better-for-the-environment>

Not a question, but an observation on things that make eating sustainably difficult - 'Children are fussy eaters.'

The SAPERE method and TastEd have a very positive impact on this. Using all of the children's senses to explore food with no pressure to actually taste/eat it. This gradual exposure to food by talking about how it looks, smells, feels and sounds like gives the children more confidence to actually taste it.

Bee Wilson has some great tips and science in her book "First Bite". She talks about Tiny Tastes program (give a child a tiny, tiny amount of a disliked food for up to 25 days, they get a sticker. <https://www.lucycooke.net/tiny-tastes>

How sustainable are meat replacement products - Quorn etc. Vegetarianism is not the answer - similar issues with some veg products not being sustainable, avocados for example. What to do!

Generally even the lowest env impact meat, fish and dairy products have higher carbon footprints than the worst plant-based products.

Meat and dairy also generally has higher land, water and pollution footprint.

A lot of this is down to physics: livestock need to eat plants, and you can't get 100% conversion efficiency, so you waste energy and resources compared to eating plants directly.

Quorn do have numbers on their carbon footprints.

That's not to say that all plants are equal: nuts and avocados do have high water footprints. Imo avocado is worth having as a treat rather than a staple (go for kale for a local, robust 'superfood".)

We are told that eating fish, especially salmon or mackerel, is good for us but much fish seems either to be farmed in an environmentally costly way, or fished in an unsustainable manner. Is there a way to eat fish without an adverse environmental impact?

Broadening your question to seafood, seafood has a wide range of environmental impacts and is better for health than planet. I recommend rope grown mussels: loads of very bioavailable micronutrients, don't need polluting feed (like farmed salmon) and in fact as filter feeders they improve the water.

I'd call myself an omnivore trying to find my way towards a more plant based diet. I probably typical in that I like all food and would easily eats vegetarian. However, I live in a household with a totally unrepentant carnivore. I think I need to take baby steps towards plant based eating. Ideas?

You need Jack Monroe recipes! I recommend her at every event.

She has some vegan meals she explicitly tests out on meat lovers, try her lentil and ale pie.

When making stews and mixed dishes, try taking out half the meat and adding in beans or chickpeas instead.

If you're interested in vegan meat alternatives, Quorn, Linda McCartney, Vivera and Oumph have some great products. I can give you more details in the chat.

[Is there an app that would help eating more sustainably?](#)

Not an app, but a great [data explorer](#) to look at different env impacts of different foods!
Also check out [sarahbridle.net](#).

[Why are supermarkets and big brands continuing to use palm oil when we know how bad it is for the environment and also how unhealthy it is for our bodies?](#)

Deforestation is bad, and palm oil is causing a lot of it, it's 2nd behind cattle ranching. <https://www.wri.org/insights/just-7-commodities-replaced-area-forest-twice-size-germany-between-2001-and-2015>

But there's two questions we need to ask about food: how much deforestation is it causing, and how much land does it take up?

Palm oil is causing deforestation but it has very, very high yields compared to other oils: this means you need less land per t of oil and there could be more space for nature. So we need better palm oil and confidence in certification schemes, but it's not simply "palm oil is bad". Palm oil is a great choice for many farmers in tropical countries.

Per kg - dark chocolate causes about 4x more deforestation (cocoa) than palm
Similar levels of deforestation per kg compared to coffee and cheese. oil. More data [here](#).

I know less about the health sides. It does have higher saturated fat than olive, rapeseed and olive oil, but lower than coconut oil. Meat, dairy have high-ish levels of unsaturated fat.
(Looks at Giles), I think saturated fat is not as bad for health as we've popularly thought.
<https://www.mpevans.co.uk/palm-oil/palm-oil-nutrition/composition-of-palm-oil>
<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/324844#coconut-oil>

[Is it better to eat local food in season or eat low carbon foods that incur emissions from transportation?](#)

Low carbon foods that can be transported by ship or train!
Have a look here to see relatively small amount of transport emissions for food.
<https://ourworldindata.org/environmental-impacts-of-food?country=>

[What is the truth about soya and the impact on the environment? I went veggie aged 12 as free range and organic was too expensive, but back to meaty age 30 as I was cooking for a family and back to veggie now age 44 and my family are happy to eat that.... mostly. But I am still confused by the impact of meat replacement especially vegan products compared to a dairy diet or omni diet. Or are we just best to simplify and just eat everything as long as it's local? Thank you.](#)

Local isn't as important as people think in terms of carbon emissions.
Much better to eat soy directly than feed it to pigs, chickens and cows.
[Here](#) is some useful data on food footprints.

[How do get schools with small grounds to copy the Washingborough Academy? Do we need a government subsidy?](#)

There are fantastic programmes such as Edible Playgrounds and as we have just discovered, apoc systems for growing food inside schools all year round. We are now growing our salads and herbs for the dining room on the 'living walls' in the school corridors.

What are your thoughts on lab grown meat? Is it a promising way to a more sustainable food production without altering the desire to consume meat?

I'm agnostic! I think there are already so many great meat alternatives made from soy, peas and other pulses.

I think as climate change worsens it is very important that we have different options to feed ourselves, e.g. "lab grown" food might not depend on the seasons and regular/normal weather.

Re food miles, Emma has previously said something I found interesting and surprising about the importance of food miles ie importance of on-farm food miles, and relative unimportance of transporting the food product (if I understood correctly)

Correct! It is vital we sort out transport emissions! But most of that is from transporting ourselves rather than food. If you worry about food miles and fly on holiday you've got transport priorities back to front!

We absolutely shouldn't be air freighting food (or ourselves). But most emissions are on farms. More data [here](#).

in Europe/France especially children begin their meals with salad or veg and then maybe have fish or meat... this is a great way of approaching a new way of eating in uk. What do you think?

I think that could be a great idea! I find it helpful myself to fill up on veg before starting on other food groups.

Avocados are like the elephant in the veg room. What are your opinions on the benefits vs the issues of environment in restricted diets?

I have avocados as an occasional treat. They do have a high water footprint, but still generally has a lower water footprint than beef.

Absolutely love these tips from Jason! I encourage my 4 year old to unpack the veg box with me each week - so far her interest hasn't translated into actually eating the veg but I'll persevere! Question: any comments on the psychology of meat-eating? I know so many people (including my partner) who think it's not a 'proper' main meal unless it involves meat.

Try putting the veg into a large (clean) sock and then getting your daughter to put her hand in and describe what she feels and if she can guess the vegetable. Such a lovely exercise to do with children.

Emma: would love any recipe tips for mussels! I've never managed to get used to the texture...

I cheat and go for packets in delicious sauces!

Jason - do you teach your kids cooking skills so they can avoid ready meals and Deliveroo takeaways?

Yes we do. Really important that the children gain the skills to be able to prepare meals themselves.

We link these recipes with the theme that they are studying at the time. Key to this is to ensure that the teachers have the skills too and that the leadership team allocate finances to support this.

Needless to say it is the most popular lesson for both children and teachers.

Very informative panel so far! Just wondering what your thoughts are on documentaries such as cowspiracy and seaspiracy? In particular, their comments on the MSC label?

I haven't seen seaspiracy. Have seen Cowspiracy: agreed with the message, some of the stats were way off. V helpful for raising the profile of these issues.

Important point here on cost: many families in my dietetic practice are really struggling not only with cost of fruit and veg, but household problems: storage, lack of cooking facilities etc

Of course we recognise a lot of food poverty, but vegetables are not as expensive as meat. Lentils and beans are cheap too. But we have to educate people about adopting a sustainable diet.

What's the name of the gloves the children at your school use to protect their hands when using sharp knives?

They are called 'cut resistant gloves for children'

Thanks for all your fascinating comments. My question is what is the carbon impact of meat substitutes such as Quorn or Soya based burgers. Presumably all the processing adds quite a lot over and above the raw ingredients?

[Quorn unveils carbon footprint labelling of its products and calls on other brands to follow suit as it launches new campaign to help consumers battle climate change](#)

Is organic food more environmentally friendly than non-organic - or does the fact that yields are lower, arable land needs greater, and therefore potential encroachment on forests and other ecosystems greater, actually make organic food less environmentally friendly?

Short answer: yes and no!

Here's a great blog on this <https://ourworldindata.org/is-organic-agriculture-better-for-the-environment>

Emma has touched upon my question, thank you! About how stressed or tired people cannot always garner the energy to cook food.

Absolutely! We need to recognise the mental health impacts of poverty. It's not just a lack of money it's huge amounts of stress.

Yes yes yes on the significant TIME cost of eating healthily and sustainably! If you work shifts or multiple jobs plus caring for children/relatives and domestic work, it's hard to cook from scratch every night even if you do have the money!

Exactly! I bulk cook for this very reason! If you're time poor but cash rich you can get an expensive, tasty, healthy Wasabi sushi and salad. Not an option if you're cash poor!

What are ways to support increasing biodiversity (as opposed to wider climate impact) as a consumer?

Foods with lower land footprints! So there's more room for biodiversity.

You can find it [here](#)!

Organic farmers claim a low carbon footprint per hectare (about third) when growing wheat BUT the yield is about a quarter of conventional therefore carbon footprint per tonne of food is higher!

Yes, exactly. Yields matter!

Assuming that you already eat a plant based diet, what are the other things to be doing to ensure your diet is the best for the climate?

Good question! Less food waste, more seasonal food (not strawberries in winter!), then more local. Try Hodmedods for British grown beans (I'm a big fan)

<https://hodmedods.co.uk/>

Can I ask a Q about almond milk? So much water used so isn't that something to take into account?

Yes. But also worth considering the high water use of cows! V interesting that almond and soy milk have been around for hundreds of years.

<https://www.veganfoodandliving.com/features/a-brief-history-of-plant-milks/>

You haven't touched on insects as alternative food source!

I think it's a useful option - certainly for turning food waste into other usable forms (e.g. insects as chicken feed) and people eating insects directly. Feeding human-edible food to insects: not a good idea imo.

How can you tell if a product includes deforestation soy/palm oil etc over sustainable versions?

It's hard to know. There often isn't enough transparency.