



# SUSTAINABLE EATING

How small steps can lead  
to big change for your  
health and the climate



# WHAT'S IN THE FRIDGE?

This booklet is about the food we eat every day, and the impact it has on our health, our environment and our future.

Sustainable eating is becoming an urgent issue all over the world because the food we eat has a major impact on our climate, our fresh water supplies, on biodiversity, deforestation and fossil fuel use.

It also has a serious impact on human health. Our diets have become far too meat and protein heavy and too reliant on processed and snack foods. As a result, the risk of heart disease, diabetes, obesity and overweight and cancer is on the rise.

We can all help change things by making different food choices.

So, if you are ready, here's some 'food for thought' about making your fridge a force for change.



# SHRINKING YOUR FOODPRINT



We all want easy answers to how to eat sustainably, and while the science of sustainability is complex, its conclusions are fairly simple.

Shrinking our global 'foodprint' is possible if our diets are fresh, seasonal, local and 'plant-based'.

A plant-based diet means eating a wide variety of fresh seasonal vegetables, whole grains, nuts, seeds, legumes and fruits alongside small amounts of meat, poultry, fish, eggs or dairy.

Many world cuisines are, at heart, plant-based including those from Asia, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, Africa, South America and Mexico. Aboriginal diets from around the world are largely plant-based as are some newer cuisines

such as New Nordic. Even in Northern Europe, where diets tend towards higher meat consumption, there are a variety of traditional plant-based dishes.

Changing your diet isn't hard. Often it is just a matter of making simple swaps. Instead of a meat sauce on your pasta, try one made with fresh vegetables. Instead of rice, try grains which are found in abundance in Europe such as barley. Instead of a meat burger try one made from healthy pulses.

It will taste great, be healthier for you and it will also help reduce the cost of your weekly food shopping.

## FOOD EATS RESOURCES

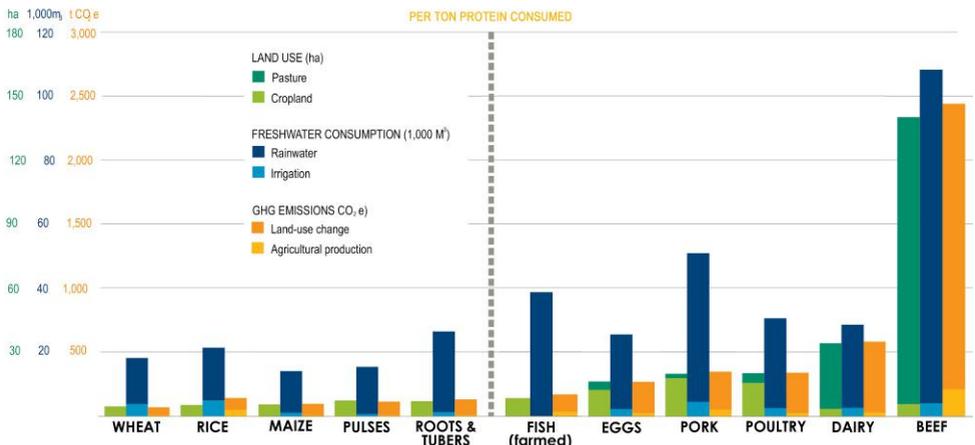


Chart courtesy the World Resources Institute, <http://www.wri.org>

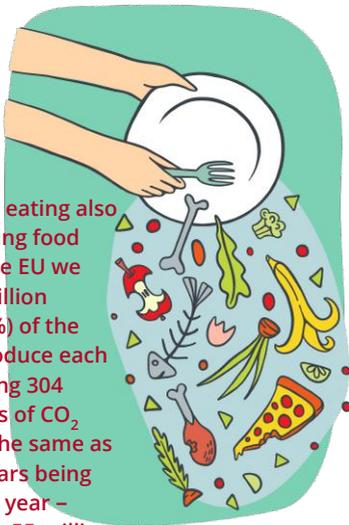
# GET HEALTHY

Throughout Europe and the rest of the world, rates of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) – heart disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases and cancer – are rising. According to the World Health Organization, NCDs now kill 38 million people each year and 16 million (42%) of these are premature and avoidable with changes in lifestyle.

Tobacco use, physical inactivity and excessive alcohol intake are all influential, but diet is the biggest factor.

Our diets have shifted away from fresh and seasonal produce to nutritionally poor, ultra-processed foods which are high in fat, sugar, salt, preservatives and colourings.

Too many of us eat the same foods each day with little variation and this dietary monoculture is also linked to NCDs.



**Sustainable eating also means cutting food waste. In the EU we waste 88 million tonnes (20%) of the food we produce each year, creating 304 megatonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per year – the same as 65 million cars being driven for a year – while nearly 55 million people go hungry.**

## FOR HEALTHY PEOPLE, PLANET AND ANIMALS

**WE NEED TO STOP EATING LIKE THIS...**



**AND EAT LIKE THIS INSTEAD**



---

# SAVE MONEY

Eating sustainably and eating cheaply can go hand in hand. Many wholefood alternatives are much less expensive than unhealthy pre-packaged foods.

Substituting pulses for meat will help you get the protein you need at a fraction of a price. Joining a food co-op or supporting local agriculture projects – even in cities – means you get fresher food, at a lower price, and you are shrinking your 'foodprint' as well.

# BETTER FOR ANIMALS

Livestock production, which puts meat, eggs and dairy on our tables, accounts for around 18% of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. This makes it second only to transport as a major driver of climate change.

There is no doubt that for the health of our planet and our own health we cannot – and need not – keep eating as much meat as we do now. The average EU citizen consumes 38kg of protein foods per year – 22kg of animal-based and 16kg of plant-based proteins.

This equals around 103g of protein per day. But most adults need only 46-58g protein per day to stay healthy.

This over-consumption also has a devastating effect on animal welfare. While modern intensive animal farms can produce large quantities of meat, eggs and dairy foods quickly and cheaply, farm animals suffer badly from stress and disease.

In factory farm systems animals are kept in large crowded, dirty and cruel industrial facilities that bare no resemblance to farms as most of us imagine them.

Raising fewer animals in high welfare systems, such as organic, can greatly improve their quality of life – and the quality of our food.

For instance, organic milk and meat contain around 50% more beneficial omega-3 fatty acids while organic dairy products like butter, cream, cheese and yoghurt contain higher levels of iron, vitamin E and some carotenoids.

Eggs from free-range and organic hens have 42% more vitamin D in them than those from indoor hens.

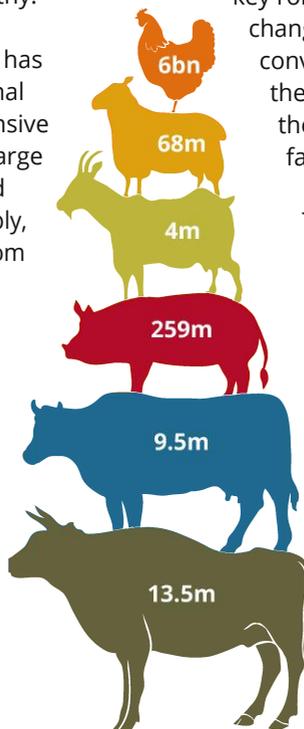
Most people don't like the idea of giving up animal products entirely – and, in fact, it is not necessary if we farm well.

Sustainable systems like organic have a key role to play in fighting climate change. If 60% of agriculture were to convert to organic we could reduce the number of factory farms, and the amount of food we waste on farms, by 50%.

To help this happen we would only need to decrease our intake of animal protein by about a 30%. This is a realistic reduction we can all make.

If we went further and cut our consumption of animal products by 50% we could achieve a 25-40% overall reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

It would also cut the cost of trying to fix the problems caused by climate change – paid for by our taxes – by up to 50%.



*Number of animals slaughtered in the EU each year.*

*Source: Eurostat/Datamarket*

# EASY COURGETTE FRITTERS

## INGREDIENTS

5 courgettes, coarsely grated • 3 eggs • 250g crumbled cheese (goat cheese or feta is ideal) • 110g flour (or chickpea flour, if gluten-free) • 5 spring onions, finely chopped • 1 tsp each dried mint and parsley • 1 clove garlic, minced • salt and pepper to taste • 2tbsp olive or vegetable oil for frying.

## TO MAKE

Place the grated courgette in a colander and press out any excess liquid • Put the herbs, onions, garlic, eggs, and flour in a large bowl and mix well • Fold the courgettes and cheese into the mixture • Heat the oil in a large frying pan • Drop the fritters into the pan and flatten gently with a spatula • Cook for 4-6 minutes, turning halfway through, until golden brown • Drain on a paper towel and serve warm with sauce or dip of your choice. Makes 8-10 fritters.

## TIP

This basic recipe can be made with different kinds of vegetables. Watery vegetables like courgette and summer squash should be drained, as above, before adding. Root vegetables like carrots, parsnips and sweet potato need only be grated. Vegetables like cauliflower and broccoli should be lightly steamed and finely chopped before adding.

# CLASSIC VEGGIE BROCHETTES

## INGREDIENTS

Vegetables of choice, cut into chunks (see tip below) • For the marinade: the juice of 2 lemons (approx. 60ml), plus the zest from one of the lemons • 2 cloves garlic, minced • 1 tsp chilli flakes • 1 tbsp each fresh thyme and parsley, finely chopped • 120ml olive or vegetable oil.

## TO MAKE

Mix all the marinade ingredients together in a large bowl • Add your vegetables and leave to marinate for 1-2 hours • When you are ready skewer the vegetables and grill in the oven or on a BBQ until cooked through • Brush with the marinade again before serving with traditional flat breads, tortillas, or on a bed of barley, couscous, millet or buckwheat • Makes 8 large brochettes (serves 4).

## TIP

Good choices for a brochette include mushrooms, peppers, tomatoes, onions, squash, aubergine, fennel and courgette. You can also add cubes of haloumi cheese or tofu or (occasionally) some lean meat or seafood. To help keep your veggies on the skewer as they cook, try placing a mushroom or other firm vegetable at either end of the skewer.

# SLOW COOKED GOULASH

## INGREDIENTS

2 tbsp olive oil • 1 medium onion, sliced • 3 garlic cloves, minced • 2 red peppers, cut into thick chunks • 1 tbsp tomato puree • 1 tbsp sweet paprika • 2 tsp hot smoked paprika • 1kg sweet potatoes, cut into 3-4cm chunks • 400g tin black beans, drained and rinsed well • 400g tin chopped tomatoes • 100ml hot water • Salt and pepper to taste.

## TO MAKE

Heat the oil in a large pan and fry onion, garlic and peppers until just soft • Add the tomato puree, the paprika, the sweet potato chunks and the black beans, then stir well to coat • Add the chopped tomatoes and bring to a simmer to warm through before transferring to a slow cooker • Stir in the hot water and cover. Cook on a low setting for 4 hours • Serve on its own or with a wide flat noodles, rice, barley, steamed greens or flatbreads. Serves 4-6.

## TIP

Try adding 1 tbsp honey to gently sweeten the dish and counteract some of its acidity - or serve with a dollop of sour cream.

# APPLE AND ALMOND CAKE

## INGREDIENTS

450g cooking apples, peeled, cored and sliced • 120g ground almonds • 60g soft brown sugar • 120g butter, room temperature • 120g golden caster sugar • 2 large eggs, beaten.

## TO MAKE

Place the apples in a saucepan with the brown sugar and 2 tbsp of water, simmer gently until soft • Lightly grease a 20cm baking dish with butter and arrange the apples on the bottom • In a large bowl, mix the butter and caster sugar until pale and fluffy and then beat in the eggs a little at a time • Gently fold the ground almonds into the mixture • Pour this mixture over the apples and bake in the oven at gas mark 4 (350°F/180°C) for an hour or until a skewer inserted into the middle comes out clean • Leave to cool.

## TIP

This is a moist, gluten free cake. Eat as is or lightly sprinkle with powdered sugar. Or try glazing with a tablespoon of lemon juice whisked into 4 tbsp powdered sugar. As a variation try using pears, plums or even oranges instead of apples.

# WHERE CAN I START?

You can eat well and sustainably at the same time. What is more, many of these more sustainable food choices are also healthier and more nutritious. If you are wondering how to start, follow these simple suggestions.

**SWAPPING INGREDIENTS** Try experimenting with your favourite recipes and see how you can swap out the most resource-greedy ingredients. For example, many meats can be replaced with alternative sources of protein such as legumes and nuts.

**MINIMIZING WASTE** When we waste food we are also wasting water, energy and other finite resources. To cut back on food waste, try buying and cooking only what you need. Leftovers can be promptly used to keep waste to a minimum.

**LESS PACKAGING** Food packaging is another kind of waste, which adds to our growing problem of litter and landfill – and the climate changing gases it releases. Buying foods that don't need packaging will go a long way to help; where packaging is absolutely necessary check if it can be recycled.

**FOLLOWING THE SEASONS** Seasonal produce usually requires fewer resources and needs to travel fewer miles to the store. It's worth checking what's in season in your region. Eating seasonally also ensures you will have a more varied diet – and therefore more essential nutrients – over the course of a year.

**BUYING FRESH** A lot of people consume too many pre-prepared foods. Often these are made from ingredients sourced from all over the world, according to how cheap they are, not how nutritious they are.

**COOKING IT YOURSELF** Cooking might be daunting, but it is a great skill to have that brings many advantages along with it. Preparing meals for yourself means you know exactly what goes into them. Try experimenting with low-energy ways of cooking like one-pot meals and slow cooking, or including more foods that can be eaten raw.

**CHOOSING ORGANIC** By buying organic, you'll be directly supporting farms whose practices emit less carbon and actually help to absorb greenhouse gas emissions. Organic foods also use fewer pesticides and have higher levels of some important nutrients.

Do you care about a #healthygreendiet?

Feel free to tag us on Instagram @greensefa and share your most sustainable and yummy veggie meals!



**The Greens | European Free Alliance**

in the European Parliament

60, rue Wiertz – 1047 Brussels, <https://www.greens-efa.eu/en/>