

THE BY BROOK SUSTAINABILITY CALENDAR

AUGUST – FOOD

Welcome to the latest edition of the By Brook Sustainability Calendar. This month we cover food.

What we eat has a major impact on our health and, with 9 billion of us, also has a major impact on the planet. Scientists estimate that agriculture is responsible for approximately a quarter of greenhouse gas emissions, plus vast amounts of deforestation and other land use changes, both of which increase climate change, which in turn puts even more stress on crops in many parts of the world.

With an increasing population, surely we need to grow more food?

It's not that simple. Action Against Hunger state that we produce more than enough food globally to feed the Earth's entire population. However more than 810 million still go to bed hungry every night and world hunger is on the rise.

Even before the Covid-19 pandemic and conflict in Ukraine, the world was disastrously off track to meet the United Nation's target of achieving zero hunger by 2030.

However, this is caused by inequality and failing systems rather than lack of food.

Failing Systems - such as what?

Our food industry for a start. What has been dubbed 'the Western lifestyle' (diet focused on fast, processed foods high in saturated fats, sodium, sugar and artificial ingredients) is increasing around the world. These foods lead to weight gain but actually cause malnutrition as they often lack fibre, minerals and vitamins. This results in heart disease, stroke, diabetes and cancer, often categorised as 'diseases of affluence' but increasingly they are diseases of the poor in affluent societies.



Ironically, while around 10% of the world's population go hungry, over 13% are obese. And obesity rates are rising rapidly in most countries; it's now at 28% in the UK.

Is meat and dairy a major issue?

Animal agriculture has the following impacts:

- It produces up to 80% of agricultural emissions.
- It is a leading cause of deforestation. In 2018, around 30 million acres of tropical rainforest were converted to animal grazing land – the equivalent of 43 football fields a minute!

Clearing forests for meat production is a major issue

- It requires a huge amount of water; around 1,800 gallons of water go into a single pound of beef.
- According to a study in the journal *Science*, livestock provide just 18 percent of calories worldwide, but take up 83 percent of farmland. Huge swathes of land are used for feeding animals and not humans directly. This has a massive impact on biodiversity loss.

So do we have to stop eating meat?

While increasing numbers of people are becoming vegan or vegetarian, some meat can form part of a sustainable food system. Even one of the founders of Meati (www.meati.com), which uses mushroom roots for a meat substitute, has stated that they don't want to replace all meat, just the bad variety produced unsustainably with poor animal welfare standards. However, there is no doubt that we all need to eat less meat.

So less meat and we're sorted?

Not quite. We have other major issues to deal with, not least waste. The United Nations states "Globally, if food waste was represented as a country, it would be the third largest greenhouse gas emitter, behind China and the US".

Even more shocking is the statistic that around 33% of food produced for human consumption is lost in the food system or wasted by the end consumer. (Put simply, the food you bought but couldn't eat ends up in the bin.)



Food waste has other negative impacts, such as releasing methane from landfills and contaminating materials for recycling.

So can we feed our growing population well without destroying the planet?

We need to greatly reduce the food we waste

Yes, but only if we:

- move away from ultra-processed foods which take up huge resources while damaging our health;
- reduce the amount of meat and dairy that we consume;
- use more land for feeding humans and less for feeding animals;
- cut food waste.

If we do these things, we can produce enough food using less land, and can also use farming systems that work in harmony with nature.

What can we do now?

Eat more plants and more variety. 75% of the world's food supply comes from just 12 plants and five animal species. WWF and Knorr have identified 50 'Future Foods' that we should eat more. www.wwf.org.uk

Chose your fish carefully. Go to the Good Fish Guide - current tips include buying Hake (from UK waters) instead of Cod. Farmed mussels and other shellfish are also good. www.msc.org

Buy organic. Support producers farming in harmony with nature; join the Soil Association www.soilassociation.org

Grow Your Own. Organically of course! www.gardenorganic.org.uk

Buy local and seasonal. Wiltshire has fantastic produce; identify local producers and buy direct when you can.

Cut the waste. Plan your meals and your shopping, and keep your fridge clutter-free. Be inspired by US writer Calvin Trillin's mum; 'The most remarkable thing about my mother is that for thirty years she served the family nothing but leftovers. The original meal has never been found.'

Next month we cover Energy. Get in touch at mike@vertigosdc.com

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