



VET4FOOD

VET Training for Food Sustainability



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For over two decades, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) have consistently emphasized the necessity of sustainable food production (1). In a 2010 United Nations report, a stark reality was put forth: "A substantial reduction in impacts on the environment is only possible with a substantial shift in the world's diet away from animal products" (2).

According to the United Nations and the Food Climate Research Network (FCRN) at the University of Oxford, our current food systems not only jeopardize food production but also fail to adequately nourish the global population (3). An earlier study (4) underscores that altering the trajectory of current food consumption patterns requires significant reductions in meat and dairy consumption across the world. While other strategies, such as reducing food waste and implementing precision agriculture, must also be pursued simultaneously, they alone are insufficient to render the global food system sustainable. The imperative to revise current food policies for sustainability must commence at the institutional level (5).

Globally, we are witnessing a concerning shift in dietary patterns. Rising incomes and urbanization in developing nations are driving diets that are high in sugars, refined flours and fats, meats, and other animal derivatives. If left unchecked, these dietary trends could contribute up to 80% of the increase in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Furthermore, these dietary shifts are directly linked to the rising incidence of type II diabetes, coronary heart disease, and various other chronic illnesses in many countries.

Promoting an alternative dietary pattern could not only mitigate global agricultural greenhouse gas emissions but also reduce the resulting species extinction. Simultaneously, it can help prevent diet-related diseases. Today, implementing dietary solutions that safeguard the environment and human health is both a global challenge and a significant opportunity at both the local and global levels.

A recent study conducted by researchers at the University of Minnesota (6) asserts that a global shift towards diets with reduced meat consumption and increased reliance on fruits and vegetables could potentially reduce greenhouse gas emissions by two-thirds, saving an estimated \$1.5 trillion in climate-related damages.

Another noteworthy research initiative in the Netherlands (7) has focused on exploring dietary guidelines from both nutritional and environmental sustainability perspectives. This study compared six diets and concluded that the vegan diet not only scored high on health but also achieved the greatest reduction in animal protein consumption, thus promoting the highest sustainability. As a compromise acceptable to the general public, the study recommends promoting a strict Mediterranean diet to simultaneously enhance health and sustainability.

However, achieving these dietary transformations necessitates more than just public awareness and policy changes. It also requires a fundamental shift in how future professionals in the food sector approach their craft. Chefs and culinary experts play a pivotal role in shaping our food choices and menus. Therefore, it is imperative to integrate climate change and sustainability considerations into their education and training.

To move towards healthier and environmentally friendly dietary patterns, we must encourage changes in consumption and incorporate sustainability into the food-based dietary guidelines of each country. Additionally, we must propose dietary changes for those who aspire to embrace plant-based diets, a need that remains unmet in many European countries, including Spain.

Furthermore, one of the most influential avenues for accelerating change lies in introducing comprehensive training in food sustainability at all levels of education, from K12 to higher education. This is especially relevant in vocational training programs linked to the food industry, where students represent the future workforce and entrepreneurs of the food world. Their training has the potential to exert a significant impact and a multiplier effect on the global food system, particularly in the realm of culinary arts. It is striking that, at both the national and European levels, the inclusion of subjects related to sustainability remains uneven and often absent from training programs.

In conclusion, addressing the global challenge of diet and environmental sustainability requires a holistic approach that encompasses policy changes, public awareness, and most importantly, a transformation in the way future chefs and culinary experts are educated. By empowering them with the knowledge and skills to make climate-conscious and sustainable food choices, we can pave the way for a more sustainable and healthy future for both our planet and its inhabitants."



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