

## Eat well and save the planet!

*A guide for consumers on how to eat greener, healthier and more ethical food*

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Between 20 and 30 per cent of the global warming caused by human activity is contributed by our food and agriculture systems. And barely a day goes by without the media covering a health or environment-related story about food. With more and more people and businesses engaging with these issues, asking for more sustainable food and ingredients is one way you can help support a greener, more ethical and healthier food system.

At the moment, there is no legal definition of 'sustainable food,' although some aspects, such as the terms 'organic' or 'Fairtrade', are clearly defined. Sustain's working definition is that sustainable food should be produced, processed and traded in ways that:

- Contribute to thriving local economies and sustainable livelihoods – both in the UK and, in the case of imported products, in producer countries;
- Protect the diversity of both plants and animals (and the welfare of farmed and wild species), and avoid damaging natural resources and contributing to climate change;
- Provide social benefits, such as good quality food, safe and healthy products, and educational opportunities.

In our opinion, consumers wishing to support a sustainable food system should:

1. **Buy local, seasonally available ingredients as standard**, to minimise energy used in food production, transport and storage. To see which foods are in season, see, for example: <http://www.eattheseasons.co.uk/>.
2. **Buy food from farming systems that minimise harm to the environment**, such as certified organic produce. For information about organic certification, see the website of the UK's largest organic certification body, the Soil Association: <http://www.soilassociation.org>.
3. **Reduce the amount of foods of animal origin (meat, dairy products and eggs) eaten**, as livestock farming is one of the most significant contributors to climate change, and **eat meals rich in fruit, vegetables, pulses, wholegrains and nuts**. Ensure that meat, dairy products and eggs are produced to **high environmental and animal welfare standards**. See the website of Compassion in World Farming's Eat Less Meat campaign: <http://www.eatlessmeat.org> for more information.
4. **Stop buying fish species identified as most 'at risk' by the Marine Conservation Society** (<http://www.fishonline.org/advice/avoid>), and **buy fish only from sustainable sources** – such as those accredited by the Marine Stewardship Council (<http://www.msc.org>).
5. **Choose Fairtrade-certified products** for foods and drinks imported from poorer countries, to ensure a fair deal for disadvantaged producers. For information about Fairtrade products, see <http://www.fairtrade.org.uk>.
6. **Avoid bottled water** and instead drink plain or filtered tap water, to minimise transport and packaging waste. For information about the environmental problems associated with bottled water, see Sustain's report: *Have you bottled it? How drinking tap water can help save you and the planet* - <http://www.sustainweb.org/page.php?id=137>.
7. **Protect your and your family's health and well-being** by making sure your meals are made up of generous portions of vegetables, fruit and starchy staples like wholegrains, cutting down on salt, fats and oils, and cutting out artificial additives. The Food Standards Agency (<http://www.eatwell.gov.uk/>) has a wealth of advice on all these topics.

Consumers can also do their bit by asking for sustainable food to be sold by retailers, restaurants, canteens and in public sector institutions such as schools and hospitals, and supporting organisations and businesses that adopt sustainable food principles. You could also encourage your workplace to adopt a sustainable food policy, and to take practical steps to support a more sustainable food and farming system.

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### Introduction

Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming advocates food and agriculture policies and practices that enhance the health and welfare of people and animals, improve the working and living environment, enrich society and culture and promote equity. We represent around 100 national public interest organisations working at international, national, regional and local level. We have produced two guides to sustainable food – this one for consumers and another for food businesses who wish to support greener, healthier and more ethical food.

In the first section we introduce the main principles of sustainable food, explain why these issues are so important, and list some organisations you can go to for more detailed information.

In the second section we discuss each principle in more detail, explaining what the problems are, setting out a series of achievable steps that you can take to avoid these problems, and again listing organisations you can go to for more information.

New evidence is emerging all the time on how best to improve the sustainability of our complex food and farming system, so these principles are a work in progress. If you know of other sources of information, we would be pleased to hear from you (contact details on the front cover).

### What is sustainable food?

There is no legal definition of ‘sustainable food,’ although some aspects, such as the terms ‘organic’ or ‘Fairtrade’, are clearly defined. Our working definition is that sustainable food should be produced, processed and traded in ways that:

- Contribute to thriving local economies and sustainable livelihoods – both in the UK and, in the case of imported products, in producer countries;
- Protect the diversity of both plants and animals (and the welfare of farmed and wild species), and avoid damaging natural resources and contributing to climate change;
- Provide social benefits, such as good quality food, safe and healthy products, and educational opportunities.



## Seven principles of sustainable food

In our opinion, consumers wishing to support a sustainable food system should:

1. **Buy local, seasonally available ingredients as standard**, to minimise energy used in food production, transport and storage.
2. **Buy food from farming systems that minimise harm to the environment**, such as certified organic produce.
3. **Reduce the amount of foods of animal origin (meat, dairy products and eggs) eaten**, as livestock farming is one of the most significant contributors to climate change, and **eat meals rich in fruit, vegetables, pulses, wholegrains and nuts**. Ensure that meat, dairy products and eggs are produced to **high environmental and animal welfare standards**.
4. **Stop buying fish species identified as most ‘at risk’ by the Marine Conservation Society**, and **buy fish only from sustainable sources** – such as those accredited by the Marine Stewardship Council.
5. **Choose Fairtrade-certified products** for foods and drinks imported from poorer countries, to ensure a fair deal for disadvantaged producers.
6. **Avoid bottled water** and instead drink plain or filtered tap water, to minimise transport and packaging waste.
7. **Protect your and your family’s health and well-being** by making sure your meals are made up of generous portions of vegetables, fruit and starchy staples like wholegrains, cutting down on salt, fats and oils, and cutting out artificial additives.

Consumers can also do their bit by asking for sustainable food to be sold by retailers, restaurants, canteens and in public sector institutions such as schools and hospitals, and supporting organisations and businesses that adopt sustainable food principles. You could also encourage your workplace to adopt a sustainable food policy, and to take practical steps to support a more sustainable food and farming system.

Each of these principles is discussed in more detail in section two of this document.

### 1. Eat the seasons!

#### What's the problem?

The food we eat is being transported further than ever,<sup>1</sup> and there is increasing demand for a wide range of ready-prepared and exotic out-of-season produce. These trends are associated with all sorts of environmental and other problems, such as:



- Loss of freshness, flavour and variety. Long-distance fruit and vegetable varieties tend to be chosen for their yield and keeping qualities, not for flavour, diversity or nutritional value. Many are harvested before they are ripe, and stored over long periods between production, packing and distribution, sometimes with post-harvest chemical treatments such as fungicides to increase shelf-life. Soft fruits and tender vegetables go off quickly – so those that travel long distances have to travel fast, usually by air, which is the most environmentally damaging form of transport.
- Increasing global warming. Food transport, even if it is not by air, creates greenhouse gas emissions that are contributing to the increasingly devastating effects of climate change.<sup>2</sup>
- Paying more for less. Instead of rewarding growers with fair prices for locally grown, seasonal produce, we pay for the costs of transporting, refrigerating and packaging associated with long-distance food.
- Loss of food security. We need to invest in a UK food and farming system that is resilient to major changes, such as surges in oil prices, extreme weather (such as floods or droughts) or competition from other crops such as biofuels. Otherwise, we face the prospect of increasing food prices and shortages.
- Loss of food culture. Distinctive varieties of fruit and vegetables and native breeds of meat are integral to our culture and landscape. Long-distance food erodes seasonal and local distinctiveness in favour of boring uniformity.
- Loss of food knowledge and skills. Most of us have lost our connection with the land and seasonal rhythms, and have little or no awareness of when and where various foods are produced.

#### What can we do about it?

##### Buy more seasonal food

There is growing consumer demand for more seasonal and local food. Two thirds of consumers say they are trying to buy more seasonally,<sup>3</sup> and at least a quarter of visitors to restaurants specialising in ethnic cuisine want more healthy dishes featuring fresh, local ingredients.<sup>4</sup> This is because local, seasonal food

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<sup>1</sup> Food transport accounted for an estimated 30 billion vehicle kilometres (a unit of measure representing the movement of any transport vehicle over one kilometre) in 2002, of which 82% are in the UK.

P. Watkiss, *The Validity of Food Miles as Indicator of Sustainable Development*, Defra, 2005

<sup>2</sup> Food transport produced 19 million tonnes of carbon dioxide in 2002, of which 10 million tonnes were emitted in the UK, almost all from road transport. This figure represents 1.8% of the total annual UK carbon dioxide emissions and 8.7% of the total emissions from UK road use. P. Watkiss, *The Validity of Food Miles as Indicator of Sustainable Development*, Defra, 2005

<sup>3</sup> Institute of Grocery Distribution, *Retail and Foodservice Opportunities for Local Food*, March 2006

<sup>4</sup> Mintel, *Ethnic Restaurants and Takeaways – UK*, June 2006

is seen by consumers as being fresher, tastier and more nutritious.<sup>5</sup> As the National Consumer Council (NCC) has noted, “Seasonal food can offer better taste and be more affordable, while local food can deliver freshness, reduce food miles, offer benefits to local farmers and communities and help reconnect consumers with where their food comes from.”<sup>6</sup> To support and encourage local, seasonal food, you can:

- Buy fresh food when it is in season – asking for seasonal food in your local shop, restaurant or canteen. Examples of seasonality charts are in Further Information, below;
- Buy your fresh produce from a farmers’ market or via a box scheme that guarantees that what you receive is in season;
- Join a food co-op so that you and your friends can bulk-buy seasonal produce at an affordable price.<sup>7</sup>
- Ask for British fruit and vegetables produced to the standards of a recognised assurance scheme, such as certified organic, LEAF Marque<sup>8</sup> or Assured Produce.<sup>9</sup>



### For further information

- There are now many ways to find out when certain varieties of fruit, vegetables, fish and meat are in season:
  - On the web, seasonality information can be found at, for example:
    - <http://southeastenglandfoodanddrink.co.uk/display.aspx?id=46>
    - <http://www.eattheseasons.co.uk/>
    - <http://www.rivercottage.net/>
    - [http://www.bbc.co.uk/food/in\\_season/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/food/in_season/)
- To find local and regional food producers:
  - Contact your local Food Links organisation – see <http://www.foodlinks-uk.org/FlukMemList.asp> for a list of Food Links groups.
  - If you’re in London or the surrounding counties, use London Food Link’s Local Food Finder: <http://www.localfoodfinder.org>.
- To find local producers’ markets in your area, contact:
  - London Farmers' Markets: <http://www.lfm.org.uk/>
  - The National Farmers' Retail & Markets Association (FARMA): <http://www.farma.org.uk/>

<sup>5</sup> Institute of Grocery Distribution, *Retail and Foodservice Opportunities for Local Food*, March 2006

<sup>6</sup> National Consumer Council (2006) *Seasons’ Promise: An enjoyable way to tackle climate change*, by Sue Dibb, Joanna Collins and Ed Mayo, see: [http://www.ncc.org.uk/nccpdf/poldocs/NCC133\\_seasons\\_promise.pdf](http://www.ncc.org.uk/nccpdf/poldocs/NCC133_seasons_promise.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> For organisations that work with food co-ops throughout the UK, see: <http://www.foodlinks-uk.org/FlukMemList.asp> - also the Making Local Food Work programme at: <http://www.makinglocalfoodwork.co.uk/>

<sup>8</sup> For more information on these and other assurance schemes, see the Farming for the Planet section in this document.

<sup>9</sup> Assured Produce (AP) is a part of Assured Food Standards (AFS) for the production of fruit, salads, herbs and vegetables. See here for information on the scheme and its logo <http://www.assuredproduce.co.uk/>.

## 2. Farming for the planet

### What's the problem?

Farming contributes under 1% to the UK's total economic activity each year,<sup>10</sup> but it takes up 74% of land in the UK<sup>11</sup> and has an immense impact on our environment. Historically, farming has contributed to the beauty of the British countryside; however, industrialised agriculture has also caused environmental damage such as soil erosion, water pollution, and damage to wildlife habitats by using pesticides and other intensive farming techniques.<sup>12</sup>



### What can we do about it?

The best way to support environmentally friendly farming is to ensure that you buy food accredited to a recognised standard, such as one of the schemes listed below. Many consider organic food to be the most environmentally benign form of farming, with the LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming) scheme assuring some environmental benefits. Organic and LEAF Marque accreditation is clearly marked on food packaging and/or on signs at farms, and an accredited producer will be able to provide a copy of a valid certificate. Other schemes, such as Assured Food Standards (the 'Red Tractor'), guarantee that legal minimum standards have been met, or higher in some cases. See below for further information on the schemes.

Recognised accreditation schemes in use in the UK include the following:

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<sup>10</sup> National Statistics online (National Statistics <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/CCI/nscl.asp?ID=6711>, viewed 23 July 2007).

<sup>11</sup> Defra, *Framework for Environmental accounts for agriculture – final report*. (London: Defra, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Professor Jules Pretty, Director of the Centre for Environment and Society at the University of Essex, has estimated that to clean up the environmental damage caused by food production and distribution in the UK would cost £2.3bn. Jules Pretty, "Policy challenges and priorities for internalizing the externalities of modern agriculture," *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management* 44 no.2 (2001): <http://www.essex.ac.uk/bs/staff/pretty/JEPM%20pdf.pdf>.

**Organic** – these standards require farmers to protect the environment, primarily by severely restricting the use of pesticides, and avoiding the use of artificial chemical fertilisers. Instead, organic farmers rely on developing a healthy, fertile soil and growing a mixture of crops. Studies of organic farming systems show less environmental damage and a greater amount and variety of wildlife than conventional systems.<sup>13</sup> Certified organic farmers must also operate to high standards of animal welfare. There is a range of organic inspection and certification bodies,<sup>14</sup> of which the Soil Association is the largest. The word organic is defined by law, and all certifying bodies must comply with European organic regulations. Some certifying bodies, including the Soil Association, have higher standards than these. Buying seasonal and local organic food brings even greater benefits.



**LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming)** – a scheme in which farmers audit their production systems and examine soil management, fertility, pesticide use, and pollution control and management. It encourages farms to have an ‘integrated farm management system’,<sup>15</sup> to reduce farming’s impact on the environment, and member farmers can use the **LEAF Marque** on their products. This is not a scheme defined in law.

**Assured Food Standards (AFS)** – an umbrella body for various different crop and meat assurance schemes. Standards require farmers to comply with UK laws about the environment, food safety and animal welfare, and occasionally other steps that take them above this legal minimum. Member farmers can use the **Red Tractor** logo. Like LEAF Marque, AFS standards are not defined in law.<sup>16</sup>



- **Other schemes** encouraging improved environmental performance include the ‘**Entry Level Scheme**’ (ELS), and the ‘**Higher Level Scheme**’ (HLS), which are government-run schemes known as ‘agri-environment schemes’.<sup>17</sup> These provide government funding to farmers to implement environmental management on their land. These schemes do not have logos, so it is generally more difficult for consumers to find out about which farms are participating.

### For further information

- For more information about organic certification and the rules covering organic production, see the website of the UK’s largest organic certification body, the Soil Association: <http://www.soilassociation.org>.
- For information about the LEAF Marque, see <http://www.leafuk.org/leaf/>.
- For information about the Red Tractor logo and the various assurance schemes associated with it, see [http://www.redtractor.org.uk/site/rt\\_home.php](http://www.redtractor.org.uk/site/rt_home.php).
- To find accredited producers in your region, contact the relevant accrediting organisation.

<sup>13</sup> For information on the environmental and sustainability benefits of organic farming, see Defra’s website: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/organic/consumers/index.htm>.

<sup>14</sup> There are 10 UK approved organic certifying authorities – for a full list, see: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/organic/standards/certbodies/approved.htm>.

<sup>15</sup> LEAF: <http://www.leafuk.org/leaf/organisation>

<sup>16</sup> See [www.littleredtractor.org.uk](http://www.littleredtractor.org.uk) for further information

<sup>17</sup> For further information see <http://www.defra.gov.uk/erdp/schemes/es/default.htm>

### 3. Meat and dairy products: less is more

#### What's the problem?

##### Climate change

According to latest figures from the United Nations, animal farming globally causes more greenhouse gas emissions than all of the cars, lorries and planes in the world put together, and the effect is increasing.<sup>18</sup> The reasons for this are complicated, but are associated with several factors:



- Large amounts of animal feed need to be produced to make relatively small amounts of meat or milk – around 7kg of grain for 1kg of beef; 4kg of grain for 1kg of pork; 2kg of grain for 1kg of poultry.
- Nitrogen fertilisers are used to produce animal feed, resulting in energy use and emissions of, for example, the powerful greenhouse gas nitrous oxide.
- Livestock (particularly ruminants such as cows and sheep) emit high levels of methane from their digestive systems.
- Natural ‘carbon sinks’ such as forests, that can absorb carbon dioxide, are destroyed to make way for animal grazing, or crops for animal feed, so removing trees and disturbing or destroying soil.
- Animals, their feed and the resulting animal products are usually transported, often over large distances, and usually in energy-intensive refrigerated conditions.
- The demand for meat and dairy products is increasing, especially in booming Eastern economies, shifting from traditional diets to a more Western pattern of consumption.

##### Animal welfare

Much of the meat on sale in the UK is produced intensively, with little or no regard for animal welfare. According to Compassion in World Farming<sup>19</sup>:

“The explosion in meat consumption is paralleled by the global expansion of industrial ‘factory farming’ of animals, a system which by its very nature compromises basic welfare standards. In factory farms, the animals suffer from confinement, isolation or overcrowding and the frustration of their natural behaviour.”<sup>20</sup>

The most frequent forms of poor practice include:

- Overstocking, which can encourage disease to develop and spread. Antibiotics are frequently used to counter this problem, which leads to their overuse as bacteria become resistant to them. Rearing animals in smaller groups would be a more sustainable way to avoid the problem in the first place. Overstocking prevents some animals from getting access to enough food, which can lead to bullying, fighting and injuries. Overstocking can also result in animals not having enough space to move around or exhibit natural behaviour.

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<sup>18</sup> To see details of the United Nations research into meat and the environment, visit: <http://www.fao.org/newsroom/en/news/2006/1000448/index.html>. See also Steinfeld, H et al. (2006) *Livestock's long shadow: Environmental issues and options*. Food and Agriculture Organization, Rome. [http://www.virtualcentre.org/en/library/key\\_pub/longshad/A0701E00.htm](http://www.virtualcentre.org/en/library/key_pub/longshad/A0701E00.htm)

<sup>19</sup> Compassion in World Farming was established by a dairy farmer who had become concerned about factory farming methods, to campaign for improved standards of animal welfare in the farming industry. See <http://www.ciwf.org/>.

<sup>20</sup> Compassion in World Farming Trust (2004) *Reducing Meat Consumption: The case for urgent reform*. See: [http://www.ciwf.org/publications/reports/Global\\_benefits\\_summary.pdf](http://www.ciwf.org/publications/reports/Global_benefits_summary.pdf)  
Also see the Compassion in World Farming Eat Less Meat campaign at: [http://www.ciwf.org.uk/campaigns/primary\\_campaigns/eat\\_less\\_meat.html](http://www.ciwf.org.uk/campaigns/primary_campaigns/eat_less_meat.html)

- ‘Corner cutting’ techniques that benefit the farmer but can harm the animal, e.g. dehorning animals, which causes them discomfort, weaning animals too young, and routinely using electric prods.

## Meat and health

Although we do not need meat in our diets, eating small amounts is not a health problem, and many people enjoy it. However, there is growing evidence of a link between consumption of red and processed meats and certain types of cancer, hence the long-standing recommendation from the Department of Health<sup>21</sup> that that “lower consumption of red and processed meat would probably reduce the risk of colorectal cancer” and that “individuals’ consumption of red and processed meat should not rise...from around 90g/day cooked weight”. A recent report published by the World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF)<sup>22</sup> is even more stringent, reducing the recommended daily amount of red meat to around 70g a day, or less than 500g per week, and also noting that very little, *if any*, processed meat should be eaten.<sup>23</sup>

Meat and some dairy products, and particularly meat products like sausages, pies and breaded products, also tend to be high in fat and saturated fat and are often high in salt. High fat consumption is linked to increased risk of obesity, heart disease and strokes. Even popular white meats such as poultry, often chosen for their apparent health benefits, have been found to be fatter than in the past due to methods of production and processing.<sup>24</sup>

On a more positive note, there is plenty of scientific evidence that eating a greater proportion of foods of plant origin (fruit, vegetables, pulses, nuts, seeds and wholegrain foods) can reduce the risks of serious diseases such as heart disease and certain cancers. Foods of plant origin tend to be naturally low in fat and salt and also contain high levels of other useful nutrients such as vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and dietary fibre.

## What can we do about it?



### Eat less meat

The conclusion is that we should all eat less meat (especially red meat and processed meat) and fewer products of animal origin, both to reduce significantly our effects on the environment, and to improve our health. While the number of vegetarians in the UK has remained relatively stable over recent years, evidence suggests that more and more people are trying to eat less meat – indeed some market research suggests that ‘meat reducers’ account for 45% of the population.<sup>25</sup>

To reduce the environmental impact of the food you eat you can, for example:

<sup>21</sup> Department of Health (1998), "Nutritional aspects of the development of cancer", Report of the Working Group on Diet and Cancer, Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy (COMA), Report on Health and Social Subjects No. 48, HMSO, London

<sup>22</sup> World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF, 2007). Food, Nutrition, Physical Activity and the Prevention of Cancer: A Global Perspective. Washington DC.

<sup>23</sup> The WCRF report (2007) defines processed meat as meat preserved by smoking, curing or salting, or addition of chemical preservatives, including that contained in processed food.

<sup>24</sup> Wang Y Q, Thomas B, Ghebremeskel K and Crawford M A (2004) Changes in Protein and Fat Balance of Some Primary Foods: Implications for Obesity? Institute of Brain Chemistry and Human Nutrition, London Metropolitan University

<sup>25</sup> Data on market trends in consumers choosing to eat less meat are collected regularly by the TNS Family Food Panel ([www.tns-global.com](http://www.tns-global.com)), and reported by the food industry's Food and Drink Federation on its dedicated Meat Free website: [http://www.meat-free.org.uk/mf\\_market\\_trends.aspx](http://www.meat-free.org.uk/mf_market_trends.aspx)

- **Reduce the amount of red and processed meat you use overall.** Prepare food that uses smaller amounts of flavoursome meat to good effect, with the bulk of the meal being made of foods of plant origin.
- **Try out more vegetarian options** with higher levels of fruit, vegetable and wholegrain ingredients, and reduced amounts of fat and animal products (i.e. not simply replacing a meat component with cheese). Why not start with a meat-free day, and build up to more veggie meals from there?

### Buy the best

Recent research shows 67% of consumers already think animal welfare is an important issue,<sup>26</sup> and over 50% of the population is currently making at least one or two purchase decisions as a result of their attitude to animal welfare standards.<sup>27</sup> Use the money you saved from cutting back on the amount of meat you use to buy local or British meat produced to high environmental and animal welfare standards. Ask for British<sup>28</sup> meat produced to the standards of a recognised assurance scheme, such as:



**Certified organic** – as well as upholding environmental standards, organic certification tends to require higher standards of animal welfare than the other schemes listed here. For more information on organic standards and certifying bodies, see the ‘Farming for the planet’ section in this document.



**Free range** – the description ‘free range’ is defined in European law, but only for poultry. Free range poultry farming systems must allow poultry to have access to open-air runs that are mainly covered with vegetation, and have rules governing the amount of space that the birds have and the type of shelter provided. Other animals such as pigs are often described as ‘free range’ or ‘outdoor reared,’ but these terms are not legally defined.



**RSPCA Freedom Foods**<sup>29</sup> – this scheme aims to improve farm animal welfare; it does not include environmental standards. The RSPCA’s Farm Animal Department sets the standards for each species, controlling rearing, handling, transportation and slaughter. Member farms are assessed and monitored by an independent body, and can use the Freedom Foods logo on their products. A product that carries the Freedom Foods logo does not necessarily come from a free range animal.



**Assured Food Standards**<sup>30</sup> – this is an umbrella body representing a number of different assurance schemes, and is represented by the ‘Red Tractor’ logo. Standards require farmers to meet legal requirements for food safety, environmental protection and animal welfare as a minimum. However, AFS schemes do not require that animals or birds have outdoor access, and have been criticised for being insufficiently stringent, in terms of both the environment and animal welfare.<sup>31</sup>

See footnotes for links to more information on these schemes.

You may also like to consider buying ‘rare breed’ meat from native British breeds of livestock. Over centuries these indigenous animals have, through selective breeding and natural evolution, adapted to become as efficient as possible in their local environment, making the most of the type, quantity and

<sup>26</sup> Ethical Consumerism (2006) Institute of Grocery Distribution, Consumer Unit

<sup>27</sup> Consumer Attitudes to Animal Welfare (2007) Institute of Grocery Distribution

<sup>28</sup> For more information on the benefits of choosing local produce, see the ‘Eat the seasons!’ section in this document.

<sup>29</sup> See the Freedom Food website:

<http://www.rspca.org.uk/servlet/Satellite?pagename=RSPCA/RSPCARedirect&pg=FreedomFoodHomepage>

<sup>30</sup> See here for information on the Red Tractor logo: [http://www.redtractor.org.uk/site/rt\\_home.php](http://www.redtractor.org.uk/site/rt_home.php)

<sup>31</sup> Compassion in World Farming, ‘Farm Assurance Schemes & Animal Welfare - Can We Trust Them?’ 2002 – see here for full report: <http://www.ciwf.org.uk/littleredtractor/Images/Farm%20Assurance%20Report.pdf> or here for a summary: <http://www.ciwf.org.uk/littleredtractor/index.htm>

quality of the food available and the climate. In return, the livestock benefit their native environment. Many people say that these breeds also provide a tastier product.<sup>32</sup>

### **For further information**

For background reading, take a look at the following websites which give more information about this important subject:

- For more information about farm animal welfare, see the Compassion in World Farming website: <http://www.ciwf.org/>.
- For more reasons to reduce meat consumption, see the website of the Compassion in World Farming's Eat Less Meat campaign: <http://www.eatlessmeat.org>.
- To see details of the United Nations research into meat production and its effects on the environment, visit: <http://www.fao.org/newsroom/en/news/2006/1000448/index.html>.
- For detailed scientific and background information on the climate change effects of animal feed production, see the following paper by the Food Climate Research Network: <http://www.fcrn.org.uk/frcnresearch/publications/PDFs/TG%20society%20animal%20feed%20paper%2029-1-07.pdf>.
- A major new report from the Food Climate Research Network explores the livestock sector's contribution to the UK's greenhouse gas emissions and assesses what less greenhouse gas intensive systems of production and consumption might look like. See: <http://www.fcrn.org.uk/frcnresearch/publications/PDFs/TG%20FCRN%20livestock%20final%206%20Nov%20.pdf>

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<sup>32</sup> For more information about rare breeds see the website of the Rare Breed Survival Trust: <http://www.rbst.org.uk/>.

## 4. Plenty more fish in the sea...?

### What's the problem?

Our appetite for fish has increased so rapidly over the past fifty years, matched by the increasing industrialisation of the fishing industry that we are seriously at risk of losing some species from our seas for ever. Over three quarters of the world's fish stocks are currently either fully or over exploited,<sup>33</sup> and some scientists estimate that, at the current rates of depletion, most of the world's fish stocks will collapse by 2048.<sup>34</sup> As millions of people depend on fish for food and for their livelihood, this would have dire social as well as ecological consequences.<sup>35</sup>

The environmental problems associated with fishing include:

- Loss of marine biodiversity, not only from declining fish stocks but also from 'bycatch' – non-target (and often commercially useless) species such as whales, sharks, dolphins, sea-birds and young fish being accidentally killed by fishing gear;
- Damage to sensitive areas of the sea bed and other marine environments by certain fishing methods, particularly bottom trawling.

Efforts to address these issues are being undermined by illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) or 'pirate' fishing, some of the spoils of which end up in the UK market. Pirate fishing is thought by some experts to pose the single greatest threat to the achievement of sustainable fish stocks.<sup>36</sup>

Fish farming, or aquaculture, can seem like a solution to many of these problems, and the aquaculture industry has boomed in recent years, with farmed species including salmon, trout, sea bass and prawns. However, aquaculture is often very intensive and is associated with a host of social and environmental problems, such as:

- A poor 'feed conversion ratio' – many farmed species are carnivorous (they need to be fed other fish), and around 3kg of wild caught fish are needed to produce, for example, 1kg of farmed salmon;<sup>37</sup>
- Diseases and parasites such as sea lice, resulting from the high concentration of fish in each pen, which can also spread to wild stocks;
- Pollution – this can include fish faecal matter, antibiotics and toxic chemicals such as 'anti-foulants' used to keep cages and netting free of seaweed and barnacles;<sup>38</sup>
- Animal welfare problems – this may be a particular issue with fish that would usually migrate, such as salmon;
- The destruction of sensitive and ecologically important habitats – this problem is particularly associated with parts of Asia and Latin America, where huge tracts of mangrove swamp have been destroyed in the development of prawn farming;
- Poor employment conditions, the loss of livelihoods and food security, and the displacement of coastal people – also particularly associated with prawn farming in poorer countries.<sup>39</sup>



<sup>33</sup> 52% of the world's fish stocks are currently fully exploited (i.e. being fished at their maximum biological capacity), and a further 24% are over exploited, depleted or recovering from depletion. Figures from the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), 2005 – see [http://eng.msc.org/html/content\\_528.htm](http://eng.msc.org/html/content_528.htm).

<sup>34</sup> Information from the Environmental Justice Foundation, see: <http://www.ejfoundation.org/page357.html>

<sup>35</sup> Figures from FAO, as above.

<sup>36</sup> In 2006 the Environmental Justice Foundation and Greenpeace carried out a joint investigation into the impact of IUU fishing off the coast of Guinea, linking illegal fishing operations to seafood on sale in the UK – see <http://www.ejfoundation.org/page357.html>.

<sup>37</sup> This is according to a study published in the scientific journal Nature – see: <http://www.puresalmon.org/feed.html>.

<sup>38</sup> Sustain (2005) *Like Shooting Fish in a Barrel: the collapse of world fisheries in the 21st century and what we can do to prevent it happening*: <http://www.sustainweb.org/publications/info/143/>

Organic fish farming aims to reduce some of these problems, but opinions vary as to the extent to which it does so. In fact, some people believe that organic standards should not apply to salmon aquaculture – not least because the confined conditions in which farmed salmon are kept are so at odds with their natural, migratory habits.<sup>40</sup>

## Fish and health

Oily fish such as mackerel, herring and sardines can be a valuable source of omega-3 fats, which are believed to have important benefits for heart health and mental development. However, there is clearly a problem with promoting increased consumption of fish for human health when fish are so under threat. More and more organisations are now promoting sustainable fishing, to ensure that health benefits of fish consumption can be enjoyed by future generations.

There are some health problems associated with increasing the amount of oily fish we eat. The same fatty tissues in fish that provide valuable omega-3 fats also tend to have high levels of pollutants such as mercury and synthetic chemicals called PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls). PCBs accumulate in the body and can damage the development of foetuses; for this reason, pregnant women are advised to limit the amount of fish they eat and avoid certain types of oily fish altogether.<sup>41</sup>



## What can we do about it?

A very significant 77% of consumers are already concerned about seafood sustainability, according to a recent study,<sup>42</sup> and with the current state of fish stocks this concern is likely to grow. A consumer survey showed that purchases of sustainable fish rose by a massive 224% in 2007.<sup>43</sup> To play your part in conserving the marine environment:

- **Stop buying fish from overfished stocks or badly managed fisheries** as listed on the Marine Conservation Society's 'fish to avoid' list.<sup>44</sup>
- **Ask your local retailer, fishmonger or restaurant** for assurances that the fish they supply has been legally and sustainably caught (and for evidence if you are not convinced by the answer). Most importantly, ask:
  - **where** the fish was caught – as the sustainability of some species varies according to location (again, see the 'fish to avoid' list) – don't be fobbed off with "it's from Billingsgate"!
  - **how** it was caught – bottom trawling is generally considered to be one of the most environmentally damaging fishing methods, but driftnets<sup>45</sup> and even longlines are also

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<sup>39</sup> The Environmental Justice Foundation has published a series of reports on the problems associated with shrimp aquaculture – see for example *Farming the Sea, Costing the Earth: Why we must green the blue revolution*: [http://www.ejfoundation.org/pdf/farming\\_the\\_sea\\_costing\\_the\\_earth.pdf](http://www.ejfoundation.org/pdf/farming_the_sea_costing_the_earth.pdf).

<sup>40</sup> See <http://www.puresalmon.org/organic.html>, and Joanna Blythman, "Why organic salmon is causing a nasty smell", *The Observer*, 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2006: <http://observer.guardian.co.uk/foodmonthly/story/0,,1925040,00.html>.

<sup>41</sup> See advice on the Food Standards Agency for foods to avoid during pregnancy: <http://www.eatwell.gov.uk/agesandstages/pregnancy/whenyrapregnant/#cat226049>.

<sup>42</sup> Waitrose/YouGov survey, published August 2006, see 'Waitrose to phase out fish caught by beam trawling': [http://www.fishupdate.com/news/fullstory.php/aid/5180/Waitrose\\_to\\_phase\\_out\\_fish\\_caught\\_by\\_beam\\_trawling\\_.html](http://www.fishupdate.com/news/fullstory.php/aid/5180/Waitrose_to_phase_out_fish_caught_by_beam_trawling_.html)

<sup>43</sup> The Co-operative Bank's Ethical Consumerism Report 2007, see: [http://www.cfs.co.uk/images/pdf/ethical\\_consumer\\_report\\_2007.pdf](http://www.cfs.co.uk/images/pdf/ethical_consumer_report_2007.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> For the 'fish to avoid' list see <http://www.fishonline.org/advice/avoid/>; the Pocket Good Fish Guide is also available in hard copy from the Marine Conservation Society: <http://www.mcsuk.org>

associated with high levels of wasteful bycatch.<sup>46</sup> More sustainable methods to look out for include handline (e.g. mackerel), diver caught (e.g. scallops), jigs (e.g. squid) and pots or creels (e.g. lobsters or crabs). Phrases such as ‘traditional methods’ are meaningless.

- **Support organisations and businesses that promote sustainably caught fish on their menus using the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) logo**, which is certified to come from well-managed fisheries and not from endangered stocks, see: <http://www.msc.org>.<sup>47</sup>



Given the controversy about some **farmed fish and shellfish**, you might want to consider whether to avoid the problem and not stock them. Not all farmed seafood is problematic, however; tilapia, for example, is a non-carnivorous fish (i.e. it eats plant food, not other fish) that can be farmed sustainably, and farmed mussels are tasty and sustainable and may be available from local sources.

### For further information

- For details about the problems associated with **overfishing, trawling and aquaculture**, see:
  - Greenpeace’s ‘Defending Our Oceans’ campaign: <http://oceans.greenpeace.org/en/our-oceans>
  - The World Wide Fund (WWF) for Nature’s marine programme: <http://www.wwf.org.uk/researcher/issues/livingseas/0000000020.asp>
  - The Environmental Justice Foundation’s campaigns and reports on bycatch, pirate fishing and prawn (shrimp) aquaculture: <http://www.ejfoundation.org/>
  - Sustain’s report, “Like Shooting Fish in a Barrel: the collapse of world fisheries in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and what we can do to prevent it happening”: <http://www.sustainweb.org/publications/info/143/>
  - Forum for the Future’s report ‘Fishing for Good’, see: <http://www.forumforthefuture.org.uk/docs/publications/217/fishgood.pdf>
- Contact the **Marine Stewardship Council** for details of suppliers of MSC-certified fish: <http://www.msc.org>.
- For the **Marine Conservation Society’s lists of ‘fish to eat’ and ‘fish to avoid’** see <http://www.fishonline.org>.
- Contact the **Seafood Choices Alliance** (<http://www.seafoodchoices.com>) on 020 7811 3347 for details of their forthcoming **Seafood Sourcing Directory**, a guide to 50 of Britain’s top seafood species and their sustainability.

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<sup>45</sup> Driftnets are now illegal in many national and international waters, including the Mediterranean and the Eastern Atlantic, but are still being used in IUU fishing operations in these areas – see <http://www.ejfoundation.org/page171.html>

<sup>46</sup> See the Marine Conservation Society’s league table identifying the most and least sustainable fishing methods: [http://www.fishonline.org/caught\\_at\\_sea/methods/Fishing\\_Methods\\_League\\_Table.pdf](http://www.fishonline.org/caught_at_sea/methods/Fishing_Methods_League_Table.pdf).

<sup>47</sup> Note that some MSC-certified fish available in the UK is transported over long distances, sometimes by airfreight, though usually by sea; where possible, choose MSC-certified fish from the waters around the UK to support local, sustainable fisheries.

## 5. Trade fair

### What's the problem?

World market prices for commodity crops such as coffee, sugar and rice are highly volatile, often falling below the costs of production. Between 1970 and 2000, prices for some of the main agricultural exports of poorer countries fell by between 30 and 60 per cent.<sup>48</sup> The reasons for this are complex, and related to unfair rules governing international trade, which oblige many poorer countries to open their own markets to imports while producing goods for export. According to Oxfam, this means that:



“Poor farmers are faced with falling crop prices, a falling share of the retail price of produce they sell, competing goods from rich countries dumped on their markets at subsidised prices, and a lack of meaningful access to those countries’ markets for their own produce.”<sup>49</sup>

The consequences can be devastating for both small-scale producers and agricultural labourers. With few – if any – other employment opportunities open to them, and no welfare state to fall back on, many small farmers are unable to afford basic necessities such as food for their families, healthcare, and education for their children. Labourers on plantations fare little better, often facing gruelling hours, low pay, no job security, unpleasant or downright dangerous living and working conditions, sexual harassment and serious health problems resulting from the use of hazardous pesticides. Many plantation workers have been prevented from joining trade unions by intimidation and sometimes even physical violence.

### Fairtrade and well-being

Buying Fairtrade products is about improving the well-being and livelihoods of agricultural producers and labourers in poorer countries, by improving trading relationships and so ensuring better working conditions, greater access to healthcare and a higher standard of living. Buying Fairtrade products is one way to help people out of the cycle of poverty and illness.

### What can we do about it?



Since the Fairtrade Mark was first introduced to the UK in 1994, the UK market for Fairtrade products has gone from strength to strength. Sales of Fairtrade products in the UK exceeded £285m in 2006, an increase of 46 per cent on 2005. According to research carried out by the market research organisation MORI in 2006, 57 per cent of adults in the UK now recognise the Fairtrade Mark, and 53 per cent correctly associate it with the phrase “Guarantees a better deal for Third World Producers”.<sup>50</sup>

When buying products that cannot be grown here and tend to be imported from

<sup>48</sup> Communication From The Commission To The Council And The European Parliament: Agricultural Commodity Chains, Dependence and Poverty - A proposal for an EU Action Plan (2004). See [http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2004/may/tradoc\\_117111.pdf](http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2004/may/tradoc_117111.pdf).

<sup>49</sup> ‘The Rural Poverty Trap’, Oxfam (2004). See [http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what\\_we\\_do/issues/trade/bp59\\_unctad.htm](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what_we_do/issues/trade/bp59_unctad.htm)

<sup>50</sup> MORI/TNS data obtained from the Fairtrade Foundation

poorer countries, such as tea, coffee, chocolate, tropical fruit and juice, and rice, look for the Fairtrade Mark. This is an independent consumer guarantee that the product has been produced and traded in accordance with Fairtrade standards,<sup>51</sup> which stipulate that:

- A guaranteed minimum price is paid for the crop, which covers the costs of sustainable production;
- An additional sum known as the 'Fairtrade premium' is paid to the producers for investment in business development and social and environmental projects to benefit the wider community, and used to benefit the workers and their families on plantations;
- Small-scale producers are organised in a co-operative or other democratic organisation;
- Workers on plantations are guaranteed legal minimum wages or above, decent working conditions and the right to join a trade union;
- There is no forced or child labour;
- Minimum health and safety and environmental standards are complied with, and there is a commitment to improving worker conditions and sustainable farming methods.

Fairtrade standards are set and monitored by Fairtrade Labelling Organisations International (FLO), and use of the Fairtrade Mark in the UK is governed by the Fairtrade Foundation. Some products are described as 'fair trade' or 'fairly traded', but only products with the Fairtrade Mark are independently certified to ensure the producers have received the benefits of the internationally agreed Fairtrade system.<sup>52</sup>

You can support Fairtrade by:

- Asking Fairtrade certified products in your local retailer, restaurant or canteen – many wholesalers and distributors now offer a range of Fairtrade products in both retail and catering sizes. If Fairtrade products are not available, ask them why not.
- Using Fairtrade products at work, and explaining to your colleagues why this is important.

The degree to which companies participate in the Fairtrade system varies a great deal. You may prefer to buy from companies that commit all or most of their range to Fairtrade, or that work in close and long-term partnerships with their producers. Some companies work entirely to the principles of fair trade, and may be part-owned by producers in poorer countries or reinvest a percentage of their profits in supporting producer development programmes. There are also mainstream commercial suppliers who have incorporated a few Fairtrade certified options into their range as a result of customer demand.

### **For further information**

- Details about Fairtrade products and standards are on the websites of the Fairtrade Foundation (<http://www.fairtrade.org.uk>) and the international Fairtrade Labelling Organisations (<http://www.fairtrade.net>).
- For information about local Fairtrade Town campaigns, see [http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/get\\_involved\\_fairtrade\\_towns.htm](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/get_involved_fairtrade_towns.htm).
- For the Fairtrade Foundation's 'Fairtrade at work' campaign to switch workplaces to Fairtrade tea, coffee and other products, see <http://www.fairtradeatwork.org.uk/index.html>.

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<sup>51</sup> For more information about Fairtrade standards, see [http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/about\\_standards.htm](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/about_standards.htm)

<sup>52</sup> The range of Fairtrade products is increasing all the time, and currently includes coffee, tea, cocoa and chocolate, sugar, bananas and other tropical fresh and dried fruit, wine and juices, herbs and spices, and rice and quinoa. See <http://www.fairtrade.org.uk> for a full list.

## 6. Don't bottle it!

### What's the problem?

Bottled water is a waste of money – it has been calculated that £1,000 spent on bottled water would cost a mere 49p for the same volume from the tap.<sup>53</sup> Bottled water also has considerable environmental costs, including the energy costs of production and transport, and the environmental costs of disposing of (or, very rarely, recycling) the bottles.

### Water and health

We should all be drinking more water – it is good for hydration, digestion and all-round wellbeing. The trend towards consumers ditching high-calorie sugary fizzy drinks in favour of water certainly promises health benefits. However, we don't need to drink water from bottles. UK tap water is governed by some of the strictest rules in the world, tested to even more stringent standards than bottled water, so it is safe and palatable to drink. There are no known health benefits from drinking bottled water instead of tap water.



### What can we do about it?

Government is urging everyone to 'do our bit' for sustainable development, and some departments and agencies have a policy to serve only tap water. The Food Standards Agency, for example, now provides mains-fed chilled bottled water in 70cl re-useable bottles for all its meetings. When this policy was announced in January 2007, the Agency noted that "This will replace the current system of bought-in bottled (still and fizzy) water thereby saving on waste (boxes), energy (transportation) and promote re-use of bottles." Even in the USA, the mayors of San Francisco and New York have taken action to promote tap water in place of bottled water.<sup>54</sup>

A recent survey carried out for the National Consumer Council showed that restaurant customers resent being made to feel 'cheap' if they ask for tap water, and also resent the mark-up on bottled water.<sup>55</sup> Routinely drinking tap water and asking for this in restaurants and canteens is a powerful, simple, cost-effective way of demonstrating that you are 'doing your bit'.

Blind taste tests confirm that, particularly if the water is chilled, most people cannot tell the difference between tap water and still bottled water. If serving water at a meeting or at home, chilled tap water can be served in attractive jugs or re-usable bottles. If you feel that using bottled water occasionally is unavoidable, then choose brands that support development projects – for example:

- One Water, which donates all its profits to building water pumping systems in poor countries. See: <http://www.onewater.org.uk/index.html>.
- Frank Water, which donates all its profits to technology-based clean water projects around the world. See: <http://www.frankwater.com/whatisfrank.php>.

<sup>53</sup> Personal communication, April 2007, Water UK – [www.water.org.uk](http://www.water.org.uk)

<sup>54</sup> "Bottled out: Americans rethink their wasteful approach to water." 4 August 2007. David Osborne. The Independent

<sup>55</sup> Water Jugs Omnibus Survey, September 2007, carried out for the National Consumer Council by TNS Consumer Omnibus. See here for press release: [http://www.ncc.org.uk/news\\_press/pr.php?recordID=361&PHPSESSID=e53a08788f09cb9a6e463f9c63b9a67e](http://www.ncc.org.uk/news_press/pr.php?recordID=361&PHPSESSID=e53a08788f09cb9a6e463f9c63b9a67e).

### **For further information**

- Download Sustain's publication, *Have you bottled it? How drinking tap water can help save you and the planet* - <http://www.sustainweb.org/page.php?id=137>.
- If you have any concerns about the health and safety aspects of serving tap water, these can be allayed by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, an independent organisation representing environmental health officers, whose own policy is to provide tap water for meetings and events – <http://www.cieh.org>.
- If you want to communicate your views about your local water company, contact the Consumer Council for Water on <http://www.ccwater.org.uk>.
- For more details about reducing waste in general, including that from water bottles, see Waste Online at <http://www.wasteonline.org.uk/>.
- For information about the water industry and its standards, contact Water UK at <http://www.water.org.uk>.
- Companies such as The Pure Water Co. (<http://www.purewater.no>) and Aqua 3 (<http://www.aqua3water.com>) offer filtration systems for businesses.

## 7. Promote the well-being of you and your family

### What's the problem?

Sustainability is not just about being 'green'. The social and economic aspects of sustainable development are just as important as the environmental issues so healthy and nutritious food also has a part to play in securing a better food for everyone.



### Food and health

No-one can have failed to notice that we are facing an obesity crisis. Around a quarter of adults are already not just overweight, but obese,<sup>56</sup> and the recent Government-sponsored Foresight report<sup>57</sup> noted that, if nothing is done, the proportion of obese people will rise shockingly to more than half of all adults by 2050, with all the associated individual ill-health and social costs (currently estimated to rise to £45 billion). The same fatty, sugary, salty diet that contributes to obesity also leads to a long and growing list of deadly or debilitating disease such as coronary heart disease, stroke, several types of cancer, and number of digestive disorders and oral health problems. Importantly, the Foresight project reported that the solutions to this health crisis are not just about individual choice – and Sustain is now working with many of its members to change the environment in which people make their choices. That means better availability of fresh, healthy and sustainable food, and more support for organisations, businesses and communities wishing to promote healthier eating.

### What can we do about it?

The Food Standards Agency's annual consumer surveys<sup>58</sup> continue to show that people are concerned about the nutritional quality and safety of their food, with some 60% saying they would like more information about the food they buy. Growing numbers of people are aware they should be eating at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day, and also eating less salt, fat and sugar. At the same time, many people have to avoid certain foods or substances due to food allergy or intolerance, while others are keen to avoid additives that have been linked to safety concerns or to hyperactivity in children.



Major manufacturers, retailers and caterers continue to respond to these trends by promoting healthier products, changing recipes to remove unhealthy ingredients and additives, and using clearer labelling. The 'traffic light' system<sup>59</sup> developed by the Food Standards Agency, for example, helps customers identify which products contain high or low amounts of fat, saturated fat, salt, sugar and calories – a scheme widely supported by health and consumer groups.

Sustain does not specialise in giving information to consumers about personal health and food choices, but there are some general principles – and plenty more information is available on the Food Standards Agency website <http://www.eatwell.gov.uk>. The encouraging thing to remember

<sup>56</sup> Department of Health. Health Survey for England 2003. 2004, The Stationery Office: London.

<sup>57</sup> Trends and Drivers of Obesity: A literature review for the Foresight project on obesity. 2007. [http://www.foresight.gov.uk/Obesity/Outputs/Literature\\_Review/Literature\\_review.htm](http://www.foresight.gov.uk/Obesity/Outputs/Literature_Review/Literature_review.htm)

<sup>58</sup> Food Standards Agency page viewed on 11 October 2007 <http://www.food.gov.uk/science/surveys/foodsafety-nutrition-diet/>

<sup>59</sup> Food Standards Agency page viewed on 11 October 2007 <http://www.eatwell.gov.uk/foodlabels/trafficlights/>

is that healthier food choices in favour of plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables and wholegrains and less red meat and processed foods can also be much better for the environment.

Some general guideline principles for healthier eating are as follows:

- Base your main meals on **generous portions of wholegrains, other starchy foods and vegetables**, and your desserts on **lashings of fruit**. These ingredients are varied, delicious and good value. Try to eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day – and if these can also be seasonal – so much the better for sustainability!
- Don't spoil your food by overdoing it with oils and fats. Gram for gram, they have around twice the calories of other foods, so **use fats and oils sparingly**, both in cooking and in dressings. **Cut back on salt too**.
- **When you do use oils, fat, butter, margarine or vegetable fat spread, choose options that are healthier**. Liquid oils are generally healthier than solid fats. Avoid margarines or vegetable fats with hydrogenated ingredients (sometimes called trans fats - the least healthy of all<sup>60</sup>) and try to choose oils and fats that are high in polyunsaturated fat and monounsaturated fat, and low in saturated fat. Butter is a natural ingredient, but it is high in saturated fat, and sometimes high in salt, so use it sparingly.
- Try to **resist too much snacking**, and choose healthier low-fat and low-sugar options when you do. And don't fall for super-size snacks – it's just a marketing ploy and piles on the calories!
- Help train children to appreciate fresh, tasty food by **offering smaller portions of normal dishes for children**. There is no need for children's food to be – as it often is – covered in breadcrumbs and fried, presented in animal shapes, brightly (and artificially) coloured, and over-salted (or sickly sweet, if a dessert). Children will appreciate being treated like grown-ups if they don't come to expect food to be made especially for them,

#### **For further information**

- Plenty of information about healthy eating for consumers is available on the Food Standards Agency website <http://www.eatwell.gov.uk>.
- Information, guidance and tips galore are available on the government salt campaign site <http://www.salt.gov.uk>.
- The *Food Magazine*: <http://www.foodcomm.org.uk/> regularly exposes excessive use of additives in products, alongside misleading labelling and marketing. See also their new additives site: <http://www.actiononadditives.com> – which focuses on artificial colours and preservatives proven to have a detrimental effect on young children's mood and behaviour.

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<sup>60</sup> See information on the Food Standards Agency website <http://www.eatwell.gov.uk/healthydiet/nutritionessentials/fatssugarssalt/fats/>

## You've got better food, now...

### What's the problem?

Sustainability is not just about the food you eat. Three areas of special concern are dealt with briefly in this chapter: waste, energy and water. Whilst Sustain does not specialise in advice on these important aspects of the food system, we mention them here because they play an important part in the overall sustainability of our food and farming systems.

### Waste

However much energy is has been used to make food and its packaging, all of it is wasted when it is thrown away. For example, in the UK we throw away an estimated 6.7 million tonnes of food every year, accounting for around a third of all of the food we buy. About half of this is edible, with the rest comprising of peelings, meat bones, and so on. Food also makes up a high proportion of the waste from manufacturing, catering and retail outlets. Fruit, vegetables and salads make up about 19% of the waste by weight from supermarkets. Artificially high cosmetic standards stipulated by supermarkets and caterers can also result in large amounts of a fruit crop going to waste.<sup>61</sup>



### Energy

Large amounts of energy are also used to prepare food - in cooking and refrigeration - and indirectly in the production, processing and transporting the food. Most of this energy will be from non-renewable fossil fuels, and are therefore a significant source of greenhouse gases. In total, the food sector is estimated to be responsible for between 20 and 30 per cent of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>62</sup> Much more could be done to improve energy efficiency at home and in food businesses, so that we can all play our part in reducing the greenhouse gas emissions that lead to global warming.



### Water

Water demand has increased dramatically over the past quarter of a century, and we now use half as much water again as we did in 1980.<sup>63</sup> This is a result of changes in lifestyles and many more water-using appliances. The need for us to use water more efficiently is due to several factors – not simply because water resources are finite (a good enough reason in itself!). For example, water purification is a major user of energy, which contributes to climate change. In itself, climate change means we can expect hotter, drier summers and more unpredictable weather, with greater risk of droughts and water shortages. We should all do our bit to use water more wisely.



<sup>61</sup> Friends of the Earth (2002) Briefing Paper: Supermarkets and Great British fruit, see: [http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/briefings/supermarket\\_british\\_fruit.pdf](http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/briefings/supermarket_british_fruit.pdf)

<sup>62</sup> Calculations from, for example: Garnett, T., Food Climate Research Network, presentation to Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming, spring 2007. See the FCRN website at: <http://www.fcrn.org.uk>, and EIPRO Environmental Impact of Products, April 2005, European Science and Technology Observatory and Institute for Prospective Technological Studies, see: [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/ipp/pdf/eipro\\_draft\\_report2.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/ipp/pdf/eipro_draft_report2.pdf)

<sup>63</sup> Greater London Authority (2007) Water matters: The Mayor's Draft Water Strategy. See: <http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/environment/water/docs/la-draft-water-strategy.rtf>

## What can we do about it?

A recent survey from the market research organisation Mintel<sup>64</sup> reported that 71% of British adults recycle as much packaging waste as they can. This attitude is supported by a 2007 government survey, which also showed that around two-thirds of us are concerned about saving energy, and over half about saving water.<sup>65</sup> For example, you can:

- **Cut down the amount of excess packaging that comes around your food**, by telling retailers that you would prefer to receive goods in minimal packaging. Ask them to explore using packaging that is re-usable, refillable or made from recyclable materials.
- **Buy in bulk**. Weight for weight, larger boxes, cartons and bags use less packaging materials than smaller ones.
- **Choose goods that are (in order of preference):**
  - **Re-usable** – washable crockery, jugs, cutlery and other goods are far better than those that get used only once and then thrown away.
  - **Made from recycled materials** – to support the market for recycled products.
  - **Compostable or recyclable**.
- **Avoid goods and materials that cannot be re-used, composted or recycled**. If it needs to go in the bin, it will go straight to a landfill site, and these are filling up rapidly!
- **Cut down food waste** you produce by making the very best use of the food you buy, to use up leftovers, and to get creative with what you've got. Putting soup on the family menu is an easy and tasty way to use excess vegetables, and to cater for seasonal variations.
- Participate in a **food composting** system run by your local authority, or set up a composting pile or worm bin in your garden.
- Don't be fooled by the cosmetic appearance of fruit and vegetables. **Use blemished fruit and vegetables and riper fruits** that might otherwise go to waste.
- Follow **energy and water saving advice** of specialist organisations (see details below).

### For further information

- Waterwise specialises in providing information about saving water - <http://www.waterwise.org.uk/>
- UK food waste information is available the Waste Reduction Action Programme (WRAP), at: <http://www.lovefoodhatewaste.com/>
- Information about composting can be found at <http://www.lovefoodhatewaste.com> and information about worm bins can be found at: <http://www.wigglywiggles.co.uk>.
- Tips on energy saving are offered by the Energy Savings Trust, see: <http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/what-can-i-do-today/cheap-and-simple-tips>.
- Tips on saving water are offered by the Water Guide, see: <http://www.water-guide.org.uk/tips.html>.



### About Sustain

Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming advocates food and agriculture policies and practices that enhance the health and welfare of people and animals, improve the working and living environment, enrich society and culture and promote equity. We represent around 100 national public interest organisations working at international, national, regional and local level. The alliance is a registered charity (no. 1018643) and company limited by guarantee (no. 02673194).

**To find out more about Sustain's work, and our members, visit: <http://www.sustainweb.org>**

<sup>64</sup> Mintel report on Ethical and Green Retailing, June 2007 - to read more go to: [http://www.mintel.com/press\\_release.php?id=289890](http://www.mintel.com/press_release.php?id=289890)

<sup>65</sup> Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (2007) Survey of public attitudes and behaviours towards the environment. <http://www.defra.gov.uk/news/2007/070814a.htm>