

# Making Everyday Choices for a Healthy, Sustainable Diet

Leader's Guide

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## Introduction

While the link between food choices and health is well known, the connection between food choices and the planet's health has not received as much attention. Sustainable diets are those that meet present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. The fact sheet describes many actions, in seven different categories, that a consumer can take to dramatically increase his or her own well-being and that of the environment and the local community. This leader's guide suggests ways to discuss the concepts, and to encourage others to adopt more healthful and sustainable diets and food-related practices.

## Educational Goals

After this program, participants will be able to:

- make changes in their eating habits for better health,
- give examples of ways to buy more local/regional foods,
- describe how to spend their money for food more often at businesses with sustainable practices,
- practice multiple strategies to reduce food waste at home, and
- conserve and protect a variety of natural resources as they shop for and prepare foods.

## Intended Audiences

- Adults interested in eating, cooking, human health, the environment, food production, farmers markets, or community development
- Community organizations that promote service, education, the local economy, or the environment
- College and high-school students, and middle-school teachers
- Registered dietitians and other health-care professionals

## Preparation

- Review this leader's guide and the related fact sheet (MF3060). If desired, review the website resources at [www.ksre.ksu.edu/HumanNutrition/sustainablediets](http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/HumanNutrition/sustainablediets).
- Gather copies (or make photocopies) of the fact sheet for each audience member. It includes the participant survey.
- Provide pens or pencils for those who may not have brought one.
- Allow at least an hour to teach the lesson. If possible, answer relevant audience questions as they arise, rather than holding all questions for the end of the program.

## Presenting the Lesson

- Introduce yourself. Give each participant a pen or pencil and a copy of the fact sheet. Ask them to take a few minutes to write their name on the fact sheet and to glance through each page.

## Resources With More Information

1. Three carbon footprint calculators using several variables:  
[http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/emissions/ind\\_calculator.html](http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/emissions/ind_calculator.html)  
<http://coolclimate.berkeley.edu/carboncalculator>  
<http://www.nature.org/calculator>
2. Calculate the global-warming carbon scores of various meals:  
<http://www.eatlowcarbon.org>
3. Find which week various kinds of fruits and vegetables are in-season in Kansas:  
<http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/library/fntr2/mf2647.pdf>
4. Download a free recipe book by the fact sheet author featuring fresh local fruits and vegetables: <http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/HumanNutrition/~/doc10559.ashx>
5. Download a free recipe book by the fact sheet author featuring various kinds of protein: <http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/HumanNutrition/~/doc12662.ashx>
6. Locate farmers markets: <http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=KNOWYOURFARMER>
7. Locate direct-sales farms, local-food restaurants and farmers markets in eastern Kansas: <http://www.ourlocalfoods.org>
8. Locate direct-sales farms, CSAs and farmers markets anywhere in the U.S.: <http://www.localharvest.org>
9. Read about nutrition from the farm to your table: <http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/KnowYourFarmer.htm>
10. Download four seasonal grocery shopping lists:  
<http://www.kategeagan.com/book>
11. Read how to preserve foods:  
<http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/library/p.asp?tabid=16&topic=Food>
12. Read how to grow your own food and make compost:  
<http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/library/p.asp?tabid=16&topic=Lawn%20and%20Garden>

- After the first few paragraphs, before getting into the specific categories, lead a general discussion about the concept of sustainable diets. Mention these main ideas:
  - a. Every food choice you make has a consequence, helpful or harmful, to yourself, others, and the environment. The premise of a sustainable diet is that the decisions you make regarding the foods you eat should prevent harm, now and into the future, while meeting needs. This situation is not currently the case.
  - b. Most of the time, current store prices for foods do not reflect their actual costs to human health and natural resources. But you owe it to yourself and future generations to consider them.
    - i. The costs to human health from poor food choices are enormous. Diet-related diseases cause many preventable deaths in the United States, such as from heart disease, cancer, respiratory diseases, stroke, diabetes, and kidney failure. On the other hand, personal health stemming from nutritious eating habits results in less disease and an increased sense of vitality and well-being, more energy, loss of excess body weight, decreased effects from getting older, less bodily inflammation, a strong immune system, and an improved ability to eliminate body waste. Workers' health and safety, and the health of their family members and of people living in communities near food-related businesses, are also important issues affected by routine food choices.
    - ii. The natural resource costs of a food include its raw materials, production, processing, packaging, transportation, marketing, sales and distribution, preparation, waste disposal, and environmental contamination cleanup. The well-being of the environment has many aspects, including optimal use of renewable energy sources, conservation of non-renewable energy, high air quality, water conservation and quality, soil preservation and quality, minerals preservation, farmland preservation, reducing monocultures, protecting biodiversity, pollinator and wildlife habitat and safety, avoiding use of non-therapeutic hormones and antibiotics, humane animal treatment, and decreasing climate changes from greenhouse gases.
- As you discuss each category in the fact sheet, ask participants to write next to each suggestion:
  - a. An **A** by those they are already acting on.
  - b. An **S** by those they will start very soon.
  - c. A **G** by those they are gradually going to add to improve the sustainability of their food-related practices.
- The goal is to get the members of your group thinking about what they are already doing, and what else they can do. Encourage them to focus on just a few new practices that they could start very soon.
- For an interactive activity with a group with less than six people, go through each category with the whole group. Ask them to talk about the suggestions they are already doing, or the ones they will start very soon. Brainstorm how to do the ideas that they are going to gradually add. Then repeat the process with the next category of ideas.

13. Download two pocket guides for sustainable fish choices:  
<http://www.fishonline.org/pocket-goodfishguide#>  
[http://www.montereybayaquarium.org/cr/cr\\_seafoodwatch/download.aspx](http://www.montereybayaquarium.org/cr/cr_seafoodwatch/download.aspx)
  14. When considering buying fish, send a text to 30644 with the word *fish* followed by the type of fish you are considering. You'll get a text telling if your choice is green (sustainable), yellow (eat occasionally) or red (not sustainable).
  15. Get ratings for the sustainability of national food brands and other products:  
<http://www.betterworldshopper.org/rankings.html>
  16. Compare many USDA-certified biobased products, <http://www.biopreferred.gov>
  17. Get food waste reduction tips from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, <http://www.epa.gov/wastes/conservematerials/organics/food>
  18. Calculate the energy used by your kitchen appliances, <http://www.energystar.gov>
  19. Read about local and regional food systems: <http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=KNOWYOURFARMER>
  20. Read about sustainable agriculture practices:  
<http://www.kansassustainableag.org>  
<http://afsic.nal.usda.gov/sustainability-agriculture-0>  
[http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record\\_id=12832](http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=12832)
  21. Read about healthy sustainable food systems: <http://www.planning.org/nationalcenters/health/pdf/HealthySustainableFoodSystemsPrinciples.pdf>
  22. Read recommendations to promote sustainable diets: <http://www.fao.org/ag/humannutrition/25397-0b15c3e7126c922c68ee18e4ff4d7dd5e.pdf>
- For an interactive activity with a group of more than six people,
    - a. Divide them into small groups of three to five people. Tell them you will invite someone from each group to give a summary of their discussion to the whole group at the end of the program. Assign each group to read a different category and give them at least 10 minutes to discuss the ideas among themselves. Ask them to talk about the suggestions they are already doing, or the ones they will start very soon. Ask them to brainstorm how to do the ideas that they are going to gradually add.
    - b. If you have fewer than seven small groups, repeat this step with the next set of categories.
    - c. If you have more than seven small groups, assign more than one group to discuss each category.
    - d. After the small groups have had time to discuss their assigned category, ask each group in turn to summarize what they talked about with the entire group.
    - e. Suggested questions to ask the small groups include:
      - What changes in your eating habits could you make right away for better health and sustainability?
      - What are some ways to buy more local/regional foods?
      - How could you spend your food money more often at businesses with sustainable practices?
      - What kinds of changes could you make very soon to reduce food waste at home?
      - When you prepare meals this week, how could you conserve energy?
      - What are some ways that you could conserve water?
      - How could you reduce the amount of packaging in foods you purchase this week?
  - Toward the end of the program, ask participants to turn to page 7, the survey. Read each question aloud as they record their answers. Collect the surveys. Thank the audience for their participation. If desired, schedule a meeting to plan one or more of the suggested community service activities.
  - Mail completed surveys to: Dr. Mary Meck Higgins, 202 Justin Hall – HN, Manhattan, KS 66506

## Suggested Community Activities

- Host a meal/potluck several times a year serving mostly or only locally produced foods and beverages.
- Present this program to already-established community groups, such as social clubs, service organizations, or church groups.
- Create a social media campaign to celebrate the farmers and ranchers who provide the community with food.
- Start a culinary club, recipe exchange club, or a small group to discuss ways to implement the suggestions in your locale.
- Visit or start a community garden, CSA, farmers market, or roadside stand.

## References

For references, visit the K-State Research and Extension Human Nutrition website at [www.ksre.ksu.edu/HumanNutrition/SustainableDiets](http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/HumanNutrition/SustainableDiets).

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- Increase your family's, your school's, or your community's ability to recycle, compost, or use drip irrigation.
- Save all your food-related packaging and waste for one week. Weigh it, record it, then consider how you can reduce the amount you generate. Repeat in six months to monitor your progress.
- Compare brands for resource-efficient lighting and appliances.
- Study the websites referred to in the "Resources with more Information" and "References" sections of this guide.

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