

A wide-angle photograph of a lush green field of crops, possibly corn, stretching towards a distant horizon under a vast, clear blue sky. The sunlight creates a warm, golden glow on the leaves, particularly along the edges, suggesting either sunrise or sunset. The foreground is filled with the dense foliage of the plants.

Chapter 16

Putting the Planet First

What we eat can have an impact on the future of our planet. It can save it, or push it further down the pit.

We all try to eat right for the sake of our health, but we tend to ignore the fact that our environment dramatically impacts our health too. Today we live in toxic, climate challenged times, and just careful eating alone cannot save us. It is imperative to take conscious steps towards our environment via right food choices to avoid messing up our health big time.

Besides this 'save our health' reason, we also need to think about the need to feed the world, and our responsibility towards it. How we eat, and the choices we make directly affect our ability / capability to grow the food, and unfortunately, we have been steadfastly only depleting this asset by our every waking (and eating) moment. Every irresponsible food choice (of ours) contributes big time towards an increasingly hungry world... How's that for your conscience?

About time we wake up to the fact that eating right does not mean focusing on just nutrition, it also means encouraging and consciously practicing dietary sustainability, and ensuring that there's good food available not just for those living now, but also for the generations to come. So, the focus needs to move from just our needs (and health) to eating in a way that is good for the future of our planet and our people.

The 2019 EAT-Lancet Commission report recommends healthy diets that can feed 10 billion people by 2050 from environmentally sustainable food systems. These are essentially plant based with modest amounts of meat, fish and dairy foods. When Indian diets are compared with the recommended diet in the EAT Lancet report it was observed that Indian diets, across states and income groups, are unhealthy. Indians also consume excess amounts of cereals and not enough milk and milk products, fruits, and vegetables. Importantly, unlike many countries, excess consumption of animal protein is not a problem in India. Indian policymakers need to accelerate food-system-wise efforts to make healthier and sustainable diets more affordable, accessible and acceptable.

The Good Work!

FSSAI takes responsibility towards the environmental consequences of our food choices seriously. And that is why the emphasis on sustainability through the Eat Right India movement has increased manifold in the last few years. Amazing initiatives are being launched and implemented; creating awareness on food sustainability across India. The key components of the sustainability pillar of the Eat Right India movement includes production and consumption

of local and seasonal foods which not only help in reducing greenhouse gas effect but also encourages environmental friendly regional trade practices. Further, many steps have been taken to encourage reduction of use of chemicals in food production and preservation, reducing plastic in packaging material, reduce use of water in food processing and also reduce food waste.

The movement has created numerous organically growing platforms to engage with diverse stakeholders and benefit from their technical expertise—a network of professionals in food and nutrition (NetProFaN) to leverage the expertise of professionals in reaching out to consumers with scientifically sound messages and a network of scientific organizations (NetScOFaN) to participate in standard-setting processes. The network is formed to support and expand the outreach of various flagship programmes of the Government on food safety and nutrition, such as the Eat Right India Movement by FSSAI.

One of its kind centre 'The centre for food planet and health' has been set up by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India in partnership with Centre for Public Systems Management (CPSM)- LBSNAA with the objective to inculcate in officers (the young officers entering the civil services as well as other mid-level and senior officers) the competency to think and act in a holistic manner and promote policies and actions on food that are healthy, for both, people and planet.

FSSAI has also Constituted a Scientific Panel on Packaging to deal with the challenges of increasing plastic waste. FSSAI is committed to achieve a plastic waste free food and beverage (F&B) sector and move towards safer and sustainable food packaging by promoting food that is good for both the people and the planet.





Do Your bit

It's time to begin thinking about the environmental consequences of our food choices, and to tailor our choices based on this very important factor. We need to bring about this attitude change, before it gets too late, both for us as well as the only planet we have. Some of the simple steps that help in a BIG way are:

1

Eat less of the packaged, highly processed foods. They are proven bad for health (saturated fat, trans fat, sugar, salt, preservatives, myriad chemicals), but besides this red flag, the second reason is that the disposable plastic packaging they come in never degrades, and so is obviously bad for the planet. At least look for products with biodegradable or reusable or recyclable packaging, like paper, cardboard, wood, metal, etc. While travelling avoid bottled water too for the same reason. How difficult can it be to carry water from home!

2

Moderate your meat intake, to cut your diet-driven carbon footprint massively. So, try to get your protein more from protein-packed legumes and beans. No one is asking you to go meat free, but just toning down portions and frequency is good enough. Also, fruit is the way to go, as fruit crops yield the highest pound yield per acre, and therefore environment friendly.

3

Go organic. Now this decision may not prove practical or wallet friendly for everyone. But they do offer big pay offs to the environment... so maybe one can begin by making small switches. Find out which foods are most worth buying organic, and buy just those. Every bit counts. Increase in demand of organic foods increases the chance of that food to be grown with minimum pesticide usage and ends up being grown organically.

4

As far as possible go local and eat seasonal. This is possibly the best way to lower your carbon footprint when it comes to what you eat. This way fewer trucks and vehicles would need to travel long distances to deliver exotic, foreign foods to grocery stores in your area. Sabja instead of chia seeds... get the drift. There's enough incentive otherwise too: local food is fresher — and therefore tastes better and retains more nutrients too. Check out what's growing nearby right now and try to plate that more. It costs less too. Also support restaurants that purchase their products from locally-owned markets.

5

Grow some of your own food. Begin with herbs, easy veggies. And finally, strictly reduce waste and also ways to revamp leftovers. Instead of dumping leftovers in the trash, turn them into new meals or make manure out of the peels and non-edible parts of fruits and vegetables .

Every step, however small, counts. Not too much to ask for. Is it? After all it is our own environment and planet we are talking about, not someone else's.

