

Daily Union Article
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Title: Sustainable Diets

In last week's article, I referred to the concept of *sustainable diets* – diets that meet present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. The international nutrition journal, *Advances for Nutrition*, recently published an article that explains the motivation people have to pursue a sustainable diet. In "Understanding Sustainable Diets: A Descriptive Analysis...", authors J. Johnston, J. Fanzo, and B. Cogill explain that although our global agriculture system is producing enough food to feed the world's population, the access to and consumption of sufficient food that is culturally acceptable, affordable, and nutritious is more challenging.

As our population grows, an emphasis on improving the quality and environmental sustainability of our food supply is needed. What can we do at the local level to help improve our efforts to reduce food waste and the energy needed to prepare our food? Make your efforts personal and habitual.

There are many ways each of us can prevent food waste. 1) Instead of buying new food for our meals, eat what we already have on hand in a timely fashion,. 2) Prioritize your refrigerator storage space by placing food that need used first in readily accessible positions on the shelves. 3) Serve more "fragile" fruits and vegetables as close to the purchase date as possible. Use these types of produce as snacks, in a salad, or as dessert. 4) When packing away leftovers, place food in reusable containers that can be easily pulled out for a packed lunch the next day. 5) Be creative with your leftovers. For example, when you cook a roast that you know will provide leftover meat, plan different recipes around what's leftover to use for a second or third meal. 6) Pay attention to the dates printed on food packaging. Donate what you are not going to use before it becomes outdated. Don't pass along food that is past its "best if used by" date. It then becomes a burden for the next person who handles it. 7) Be conscientious of portion sizes. Reduce your plate waste by taking smaller initial servings. If hunger persists, then you can take a second portion. 8) Cooking at home saves on both food waste and the energy used to prepare the food. It takes more resources for a restaurant to provide this service for you.

As previously mentioned, saving the energy required in food preparation is another aspect of pursuing a sustainable diet. There are many energy efficient cooking methods you can use to help reduce energy waste. 1) On hot days, serve cold meals or use an outside grill to prepare food. When you cook inside, your air conditioner uses extra energy to keep the home cool when the temperature rises from cooking. 2) Use steaming and sautéing methods over roasting. It takes more energy to use a conventional oven than to cook on the stovetop or in the microwave. 3) Pay attention to the pre-heating setting on your oven. As soon as it is adequately pre-heated, put your food in the oven. Having the oven pre-heating for an extended period of time wastes energy and adds to your utility bill unnecessarily. 4) When you are preparing a food that needs boiling water, be attentive to the amount needed. If you overfill the pot, it takes longer (and more energy) to heat the water to boiling (see next section regarding water conservation.) 5) Use an appropriate size pan for the amount of food you are cooking. Cooking small amounts of food in large pans takes more energy. 6) Use small appliances for small amounts of food. Again, the energy used to cook is proportional to the amount of food you are preparing. 7) Avoid using warped saucepans and glass or ceramic

baking pans. They don't hold their heat as well as metal ones. 8) Fill the oven with more than one item at a time. For example, when I make homemade BBQ meatballs, I look for another casserole recipes that takes relatively the same amount of time to cook and requires the same oven temperature. You can always freeze the extras or put the leftovers into single-size reusable containers to have for a quick meal on those tightly scheduled days.

One of the commonly overlooked areas of waste in food production and preparation is that of water waste. About 70% of the freshwater used around the world is for food production. Your awareness of water waste and intentional efforts to minimize it not only reduces your "water footprint" but also save you money. Conserving water when you prepare meals is a great first step. Instead of letting the faucet run while you wait for the water to get cold, simply keep a pitcher of drinking water in the refrigerator. When running the tap to get hot water, you can also capture the cooler water into a coffee pot for later use. Defrost your food in the refrigerator rather than using running water to thaw the food. Use a compost pail for solid food waste instead of sending it down the garbage disposal with running water.

Any one of these food preparation conservation steps, albeit small, can make a significant impact on helping our environment become more sustainable. When we adopt a broader and more comprehensive effort to conserve energy, water, and food, we make a greater impact. Pick out the steps that you feel will be easiest to employ in your life, then slowly add more difficult ones. Together, we can work toward a better, more sustainable food system that saves time, money, and other resources. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!