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Title

The European Food Challenge: how can we move towards Healthy Sustainable Diets?

Abstract

In 2017 the EUPHA Section on Food and Nutrition published, after 18 months of research, a report, "Healthy and Sustainable Diets for European Countries". Farming produces more greenhouse gases than does any other industry; meat and dairy production is the main source of this. Adverse nutrition is associated causally with over 50% of coronary heart disease risk factors, and with over 40% of the risk factors for the commonest chronic diseases. It is clear that, in the interests both of planetary health (to ensure that human life on earth will continue to have a future) and of human health, it is necessary to curb both production and consumption of meat and dairy products, and to promote production and consumption of more vegetable protein. In comparison with populations in the rest of the world, European people eat less vegetable protein, but much more protein from animal sources.

To achieve such considerable dietary change, the whole food chain and everyone involved in this needs to be involved. The EU and its member states, and other European countries, need to address this challenge, in terms of political commitment, leadership, organisation, and research. Some of the major changes needed in European agriculture will be outlined; over a period of time, production subsidies for animal farming within the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) need to be moved to support vegetable protein production, and meat may have to be taxed in Europe, just as taxes are now being imposed on sugar. Reforms in agriculture policy in Finland in the 1970s and 1980s show that such changes in nutrition policy, affecting agriculture, are feasible and can be achieved.

Key references

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Key messages

1. Europeans eat more meat than is good either for human or planetary health;
2. To combat global warming, it is essential that farm-origin global warming gas release is reduced;
3. Essentially the same dietary changes will benefit both human and planetary health.

Questions

1. Are the determinants of dietary choice mainly to be found in the supply or demand sides of the food economy?
2. What dietary policy changes are needed in Europe to promote both human and planetary health?