



CHOOSE A BALANCED DIET

A Win-Win for Our Health and the Environment

Katie Pickford, MS
Dawn Brewer, PhD, RD, LD
Heather Norman-Burgdolf, PhD

You may often think about what to have for dinner, but have you ever stopped to think about how far that food travels to get to you? Was it grown in Kentucky? Was it grown in a different country? There are a lot of reasons people choose to buy and eat the food they do. People often think about their values when they choose food. Some of these values include animal welfare, workers' rights, food safety, and social or cultural acceptability. Some other common reasons are nutrition, taste, cost, and convenience. One value gaining popularity is the desire to take care of the Earth by making sustainable food choices.

What is sustainable eating?

Human health and environmental health are connected by sustainable eating. Sustainable eating is choosing foods with low environmental impacts that contribute to human health and well-being. This means taking care of the environment will also help human health — it's a win-win situation. It is important to understand the role food plays in sustaining the health of the environment so we can continue to grow food for our future generations and improve local food systems.

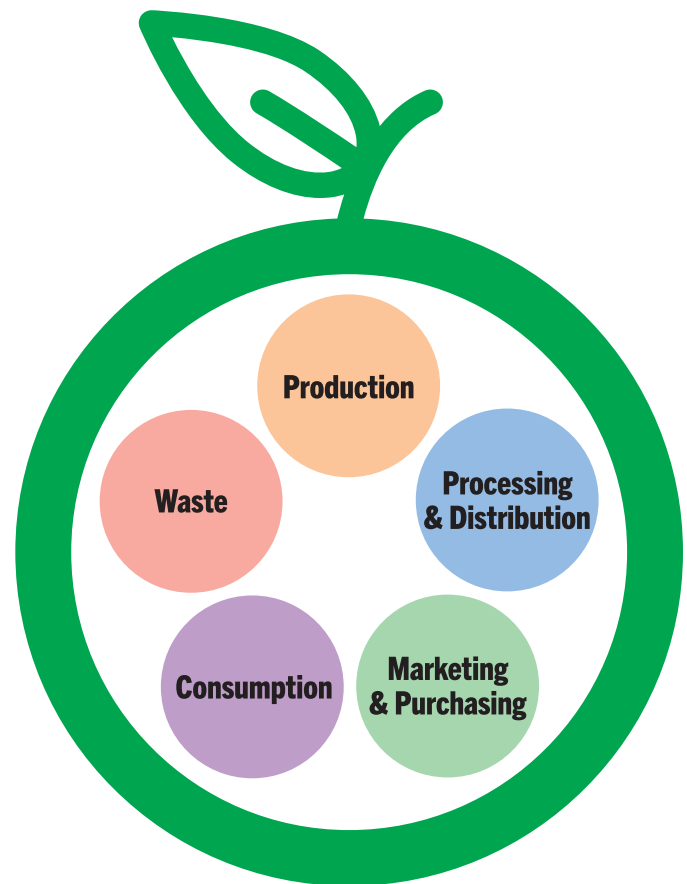


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The food system

Different foods affect human health and the environment in a variety of ways. These impacts are felt within every step of the food system. The food system includes production, processing and distribution, marketing and purchasing, consumption, and waste.

Everywhere we live is a different food system, and we need food systems to give us food to live. Agriculture in our communities is also a part of the local food system. The food system can support communities and the environment in healthy ways. However, the food system could also negatively affect the environment which can make it more difficult for future farmers and producers. Examples within the food system that could harm the Earth include excess use of natural resources, plastic food packaging, water contamination, and food waste.



Eating and the environment

Eating sustainably can support the environment and local growers and producers in your community, while also supporting your health. You may be wondering exactly *how* food affects the environment and what *you* can do about it. Food choices partially control the location where food is produced, the quantity of food made, and how each food item is transformed, transported, stored, and consumed.

The food system is impacted by supply, demand, and consumer behavior. Table 1 below describes each step of the food system. It also lists suggestions to help people make sustainable food choices when possible.

Table 1. Descriptions of each step of the Food System

Food System	Description	What <u>You</u> Can Do
Production	Agriculture uses land, water, and fuel to make products such as food, fiber, and other goods.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buy local products, if possible, to support your local economy. • Learn how local farmers and producers make their products.
Processing	Food is considered processed when it is simply cleaned, peeled, cut, or heated. Foods can be processed at different levels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for items not wrapped in plastic. • Buy items in bulk when you can. • To reduce food scrap waste at home, buy already cut vegetables from the store. • Cut, blanch, and freeze your own fruits and vegetables. • Can or preserve excess foods you may have.
Distribution	Distribution is how food items are transported to locations where you buy or receive food.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit your local farmers' market to help keep transportation of foods to a minimum. • Grow some of your own food in your yard, in a community garden, or even on a windowsill.
Marketing and purchasing	Food manufacturers and businesses make food items appealing to consumers so they will buy them as a planned or impulse purchase.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a list before shopping for food and stick to it. • Avoid going down every aisle in a grocery store. • Shop seasonally and locally to save money, when possible. • Look for the Kentucky Proud™ logo on items in your community.
Consumption	Consumption is using a food item and eating it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose a balanced diet with foods from all food groups. • Choose fruits and vegetables that have a lot of nutrients and meet your cultural and financial needs. • Consider a farm share or Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) share to consume more local foods.
Waste	Waste is unwanted or unusable material. It can occur at each point of the food system from production to consumption.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compost food scraps to make fertilizer. • Eat leftovers at home or share food with friends. • Avoid buying excess food you won't use. • Trade or barter excess garden produce with others.

Mindfulness as a healthy and sustainable tool

When we buy and eat more than we need, it puts constraints on the limited land and water that exists to support our agriculture. Mindful eating can be defined as “paying attention to our food, on purpose, moment by moment, without judgment.” Mindful eating is a unique way to practice sustainable eating.

It is mindful to think about where food comes from, who harvested the food, the resources used to grow and prepare the food, and the packaging of the food and/or ingredients. Thinking about each part of the food system may motivate a person to think about ways to make their food choices better for the environment, healthier for themselves and others, and the future.

Here are some tips to help practice mindful eating:

- Prepare a place and space to eat, when possible.
- Sit down at a table with limited distractions.
- Enjoy the meal with a loved one.
- Breathe, relax, and take your time while eating.
- Notice the colors and textures on your plate.
- Think about where your food came from and who helped grow or prepare it.
- Chew thoroughly.
- Enjoy the food experience with all your senses.
- Stop when you are full.

Putting together the sustainable eating puzzle

There are four practical steps you can take to promote health for both you and the environment. These actions are like pieces to a sustainable eating puzzle.

When you put them together, the pieces create a nutritious diet and support the health of the Earth. These actions invest money back into your local community and may even save you money in the long



run. Together, these steps ensure nutritious foods will be available for future generations of your family.

Food for thought

Because we need food to live, the need to produce it is not going away. Consumers can be food system changemakers. Any small action in everyday habits associated with food shopping, preparation, and eating can help the environment and communities. Here are a few healthy and sustainable actions you can take today.

- 1. Reduce food waste.** If you are consistently producing leftovers from home-cooked meals and those leftovers never get eaten, consider adjusting recipes to make less or find creative ways to use those leftovers. This means less food and money will end up in the trash.
- 2. Eat locally and seasonally from the Earth.** Buying foods seasonally and locally supports growers and farmers in your community and reduces the negative environmental impact of storing, refrigerating, and transporting food over long distances.

3. **Mindfully choose MyPlate meals.** Following MyPlate and the Dietary Guidelines ensures you are consuming a variety of foods over time. Eating mindfully encourages you to consider what foods are on your plate, where your food came from, the people who helped grow your food, and to focus on the flavors of your meal.
4. **Become a savvy sustainable shopper.** Make a grocery list to focus on only the items you need next time you head to the store. Also, look for simple swaps you can make to reduce food packaging and plastic waste. For example, buy your favorite snack in bulk rather than individually packaged servings.

Given there are limits on land, water, and energy, there is a need for more sustainable food systems in communities across Kentucky. Environmentally friendly food systems are necessary to ensure food can be produced and accessed within your local community for generations to come.

References

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