3 Eating Sustainable Food

Introduction

Everyone needs to eat to survive and thrive. The food and drink we consume are valuable resources that take a lot of other resources (money, time, energy and land) to produce. Producers have to find ways to satisfy an increasing demand for food from an ever-growing world population while coping with other external pressures such as disrupted weather patterns caused by climate change, rising oil prices and availability of fertile land.

Food prices in the UK have risen by 37% since 2007 (DEFRA), yet we still throw away 7.2 million tonnes of food and drink every year. If we don't respect food and act in a sustainable way, we may find it more difficult to satisfy not only our own hunger but that of future generations.

We all need to start thinking more carefully about food - where it comes from, how it is produced, how we use it and whether the food we choose actually keeps us healthy. Producers, supermarkets and policy-makers pay attention to how you shop and what you buy. By making greener choices you can help to influence the food industry for the better and make your own **carbon footprint** smaller.

Reduce Your Food Footprint

On average, food produces about a quarter of our total carbon footprint. Some people are able to eat well and produce less than 1 tonne in emissions. Here are some things that will make the biggest difference if you want to reduce your carbon footprint:

- Eat less, but better quality, meat and dairy products
- Eat more seasonal (to the UK) foods
- Buy less processed foods – cook 'from scratch' more
- Accept different notions of quality – don't expect everything to look perfect
- Accept variability of supply – don't expect to be able to buy everything all of the time.

For more tips from Tara Garnett's 'Cooking up a Storm', visit the Food Climate Research Network www.fcrn.org.uk/fcrn/publications/cooking-up-a-storm

Buy British

In general, it is 'greener' to buy food that is produced in the UK, in season and as local to you as possible. Sign up to Eat the Seasons for regular email reminders of which food is in season in the UK (www.eattheseasons.co.uk).

The UK currently imports about 40% of the food it consumes, and about 90% of the fruit and vegetables which are often air-freighted, the most environmentally damaging form of transport. Most imported food, e.g. rice, can only be grown in countries with the ideal climate; other foods may be cheaper to import than grow ourselves or may be out of season in our own country, such as strawberries in November. But there are risks in relying heavily on imported food:

- Increased prices due to poor harvests or rising fuel costs
- Disrupted supplies through natural disasters or conflict
- Countries with fast-growing populations may price the UK out of food markets.

Try to support British farmers and producers where possible, by looking for the Union Flag or the Red Tractor logo on produce. The Red

Tractor is a food assurance scheme which covers production standards developed by experts on safety, hygiene, animal welfare and the environment.

For more information, visit www.redtractor.org.uk

Buying British is also a more ethical choice in terms of animal welfare. Britain has the highest farm animal welfare standards in Europe. Battery farming of chickens and pigs is in the process of being outlawed in the UK and Europe, but 'factory farming' of animals is still considered by many to be a viable option.

For more information, visit the World Society for the Protection of Animals website, www.wspa.org.uk

Buy Local Produce

Locally-produced food will have, on the whole, required a fraction of the energy needed to grow and transport it than food that has travelled from more than 50 miles away. Buying local means you have a better chance of knowing where your food is from, who has grown it, how they have grown it, and you will be supporting local businesses.



Cambridge has a daily market selling local produce and a Farmer's market every Sunday in the centre of the city. Veggie box schemes are a good option if you can't get to the market.

For more details on where to buy local food, including veggie boxes, farmer's outlets, bakeries and more, visit the food pages of local environmental organisations Transition Cambridge (www.transitioncambridge.org) and Cambridge Carbon Footprint (www.cambridgecarbonfootprint.org).

Reduce Your Food Waste

Almost half of the total amount of food thrown away in the UK comes from our homes. Most of it could have been eaten. Wasting this food costs the average household £480 a year, (£680 for a family with children) the equivalent of around £50 a month.

The production, distribution, storage and cooking of food uses energy, fuel and water. Each of these processes costs money and emits greenhouse gases contributing to climate change. Follow these simple tips to help reduce food and energy waste:

- Plan your meals for the week ahead, and write a shopping list
- Check food labels for 'sell by', 'best before', and 'eat by' dates
- Avoid BOGOF (buy one get one free) offers unless you can easily store or freeze them
- Preserve any surplus foods by pickling, making jam or cooking then freezing
- Use leftovers. For example, a roasted joint can make another two or three meals

The Love Food Hate Waste campaign has more advice on reducing food waste and making the most of leftover food.

For more information, visit www.lovefoodhatewaste.com

Support Community Food Projects

Transition Cambridge runs several community food projects – they are a great way to get involved and back to basics with food. CropShare volunteers swap labour on an organic farm (Waterland Organics in Lode, just north of Cambridge) for a share of the harvest.

To get involved in this project visit http://cambridge.cropshare.org.uk



Image: Ben Damet

Another project, Henshare, involves making a small investment towards the upkeep of free range hens, in return for a share of their fresh eggs.

For more information on Henshare visit www.waterlandorganics.com

If you want to make changes and eat more sustainably and are not sure where to start, Cambridge Carbon Footprint organises food challenges, to try out eating more sustainably in company with like-minded people.

Read participants' comments on http://cambridgecarbonfootprint.org/blog/category/blog/sustainable-food/

To join in a future challenge, contact: info@cambridgecarbonfootprint.org

Cambridge Sustainable Food, established in November 2013, brings together the many sustainable food initiatives in the public, private, university, community and business sectors in the City. A member of the national Sustainable Food City network, the group aims to promote sustainable supply chains and access to healthy and environmentally sustainable food for all.

To join the group or for more information visit www.cambridgesustainablefood.org or email info@cambridgefood.org

Grow Your Own

It is so satisfying to eat something you have grown yourself, and nothing else tastes quite as good. There are lots of ways to start growing your own, and plenty of local, experienced amateurs able to give practical advice. You don't need to have a large garden – many foods can be grown on a balcony, patio, back yard or even window boxes.

For advice and tips on how to start, visit the food pages on the Transition Cambridge and Cambridge Carbon Footprint websites www.transitioncambridge.org and www.cambridgecarbonfootprint.org

If you want to try growing on a larger scale, you might want to get your name on the waiting list for an allotment plot. The City Council owns the allotments sites in the city, many of which are run by allotment societies. They are very popular and so usually have waiting lists for vacant plots, but sometimes they can offer smaller, starter plots for newcomers.

Visit the Council website to add your name to the waiting list www.cambridge.gov.uk/about-allotments



Image: Darkop / Dreamstime.com

Forage for Free Food

Free food is all around us – it just takes a good eye to start foraging. Wild and street fruit trees and bushes in and around the city offer their crops of apples, berries and nuts to those who can find them. Different seasons offer something to the forager, from salad leaves in Spring to blackberries in the Autumn. You do need to know what you are looking for, especially when mushroom picking, so go on an expert-led walk to be sure you collect only safe and edible



Image: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



Image: Helen Hames



Image: Keith Jordan

varieties. These 'fungal forays' are sometimes offered by Cambridge University Botanic Garden *(www.botanic.cam.ac.uk)* and Wandlebury Country Park, just south of the city *(www.cambridgeppf.org.uk).*

Transition Cambridge has created a map showing free food sites in and near Cambridge, including fruit trees, blackberries and nut trees.

Find the map on the 'food' page of their website www.transitioncambridge.org

Gleaning Network UK is an exciting new initiative to save the thousands of tonnes of fresh fruit and vegetables that are wasted on UK farms every year, often due to demands from supermarkets that the produce conforms to certain standards. Much of what is grown is rejected by supermarkets if it is the wrong shape or size. The Gleaning Network coordinates teams of volunteers, local farmers and food redistribution charities to salvage this fresh, nutritious food and direct it to those that need it most. Some farms near Cambridge are participating in gleaning events.

To join in, visit www.feeding5k.org/gleaning.php

Support Ethically Produced Food

Buy Fairtrade Food

Fairtrade labelled goods are often those we cannot grow ourselves including tea, chocolate and bananas. The producers are paid a fair price for their crop, so they can save a little money, send their children to school and afford medical care. Producers are often in countries facing the worst effects of climate change, so choosing to buy Fairtrade supports those most at risk from rising sea levels, drought and hurricanes. Fairtrade products are often cheaper than you might expect and easy to find in most major supermarkets.

The Cambridge Fairtrade Steering Group promotes Fairtrade in and around the city.

To learn more, visit their blog site http://cambridgefairtrade.wordpress.com For more information about Fairtrade visit www.fairtrade.org.uk.



Image: Anette Kay

Avoid Palm Oil

Palm oil is used in many food and non-food products, from biscuits to cosmetics, so check the ingredients list on products you buy.

Forest clearance for palm oil plantations, is destroying pristine forest habitat in many countries such as Indonesia, leading to the potential extinction of many well-known and rare species, including the orang-utan and tiger.

For more information on the environmental effects of palm oil industry, visit www.greenpeace.org.uk/forests/palm-oil

Buy Organic

Organic farming is less intensive than standard farming practices. It has more consideration for the land, the wildlife and the livestock.

In organic farming artificial fertilisers are never used, which means that local watercourses don't suffer from **algal blooms** suffocating aquatic life. Crops are fed with manure and compost, or harvested fields are planted with **'green manure'** (e.g. broad beans or clover) to return valuable nutrients to the soil ready for the next food crop.

Crops are rotated around fields to reduce the spread of diseases. For example, potatoes will not be planted in the same field year on year, to avoid the risk of potato blight.

Pesticides are very rarely used on organic farms. They kill not only crop pests but also their natural predators and the pollinators for those crops, such as bees. Without pollinators many of our most common foods would become very rare and impossible to grow on a large scale.

Herbicides are also avoided as they can kill off our most-loved wildflowers, many of which are food plants for the larvae of pollinating insects such as butterflies.

The organic way allows native wild plants to grow next to crops - providing shelter for natural predators such as birds and ladybirds which control pests such as mice and aphids. Wildlife thrives on organic farms, creating a 'win-win' situation; the crops are protected and pollinated, and wildlife is safeguarded for future generations to enjoy.

Animal welfare is high on organic farms, and antibiotics are not routinely used. Instead, livestock is kept in small groups and moved around to prevent disease spreading.

Visit The Soil Association website for more information about organic farming – www.soilassociation.org



Image: Duncan Harris/Flickr

Buy Free Range

Animal products including meat, milk and eggs that are labelled as 'Free Range' have been farmed in a way that gives those animals freedom to express natural behaviours and have access to the outdoors, as opposed to battery- or barn-raised animals. They are less stressed and this is often reflected in a better flavour and quality of the end food product.

Other products (often pork) may be labelled 'outdoor bred' or 'outdoor reared' but they do not mean the same thing as 'free range'. These descriptions usually mean the animal was born outdoors but mainly reared under cover in a barn, albeit with deep bedding to root in, scratching posts and 'toys' to prevent stress.

If you can't find free range products the next best thing is to look for the 'freedom foods' logo.

Freedom Foods is the RSPCA's farm assurance and food labelling scheme that guarantees the food has been produced to the RSPCA's animal welfare standards.

For more information, visit www.freedomfood.co.uk

Buy Sustainable Fish

It is better to buy wild caught rather than farmed fish, even if it has been organically-raised. This is because fish farms produce large amounts of concentrated waste which can pollute across a wide area, contributing to algal blooms which are toxic to other sea life.

However, wild fish stocks are at an all-time low due to over fishing. Much of what is caught is too small or unpalatable to sell, considered worthless and cast overboard – known as 'bycatch', affecting fish populations further still.

To ensure the fish you buy is 'green' only buy fish bearing the MSC (Marine Stewardship Council) logo. MSC-labelled seafood comes from, and can be traced back to, a sustainable fishery.

For more information about sustainable fish, visit www.msc.org.

Further Information

Compassion in World Farming

Compassion in World Farming is the leading farm animal welfare charity in the UK.

Tel: 01483 521 953
www.ciwf.org.uk

Plan Bee

Plan Bee is the campaign by The Co-Operative to protect bees and other essential pollinators from harmful pesticides.

www.co-operative.coop/plan-bee

Marine Conservation Society

The Marine Conservation Society campaigns to protect the wildlife in our seas. It has put together a 'Good Fish Guide' to help consumers identify fish from sustainable sources.

Tel: 01989 566017
www.mcsuk.org

East of England Apples and Orchards Project

The East of England Apples and Orchards Project works to ensure the future of local orchard fruits and orchards.

www.applesandorchards.org.uk

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Waste Partnership (RECAP)

RECAP is a partnership of seven local authorities, including Cambridge City Council. The partnership promotes waste reduction and recycling.

www.recap.co.uk

Garden Organic

Garden Organic is the UK's leading organic growing charity, dedicated to researching and promoting organic gardening, farming and food.

Tel: 024 7630 3517 Email: enquiry@gardenorganic.org.uk
www.gardenorganic.org

AmeyCespa

Free soil improver from AmeyCespa is available to collect from their site at Waterbeach, or to buy ready-bagged from Recycling Centres at Milton and Thriplow.

Tel: 01223 861010
Email: enquiry@ameycespa.com
www.ameycespa.com/east/free-compost-collection

Cambridgeshire Community Reuse and Recycling Network (CCORRN)

CCORRN has a list of local Master Composters who can offer home composting talks and demonstrations to local schools, groups and allotment owners.

Tel: 0845 602 7144
www.ccorrn.org.uk

Cambridge Food and Wine Society

The Cambridge Food and Wine Society organises Eat Cambridge, the annual Cambridge food and drink festival. For details of the festival, visit www.eat-cambridge.co.uk.

Tel: 07765 221425
www.cambridgefoodandwinesociety.co.uk