

Reducing Global Hunger With Whole Food, Plant-Based Diets

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Though many more people are growing aware of this challenge and changing their diets, our population still has a long way to go. Until we achieve this dietary shift, humanity will face grave risks. Not only does the inefficiency of eating animal products contribute to global hunger, but it also jeopardizes our health, causes animal suffering, threatens to produce an unprecedented pandemic, and degrades environmental life support systems. Switching to a WFPB diet remains one of the most powerful actions you can take to protect current and future society.



Switching to a whole food, plant-based (WFPB) diet is one of the single most effective actions individuals can take to benefit themselves and global society. Decades of research by Dr. T. Colin Campbell and numerous others have shown the extensive health benefits of this diet.

In my book *Sustainable Food Production and Diet*, I explore this research and more from a systems perspective, detailing how WFPB diets can protect environmental life support systems, reduce animal suffering, prevent deadly pandemics, and address world hunger.

This article summarizes the argument for WFPB diets and global hunger.

The Global Hunger Crisis

More than 800 million people are affected by chronic hunger,^[1] with higher proportions in Africa and South Asia.^[2] This crisis is fueled by rising populations, supply constraints, and inefficient food production systems. Factors constraining food supply and contributing to flattened or declining crop yields include soil erosion, desertification, aquifer depletion, and global warming. If populations continue to rise and we do not change systems to address them, these crises will worsen.

Reducing the consumption of animal products is one of the most important actions needed to relieve hunger now and in the future, meet growing food demand, and restore the environmental

life support systems that future generations will need to survive and prosper. That's because producing animal products is grossly inefficient compared to plant products:

- It takes over 100 times more water to produce one pound of beef than one pound of wheat.
- It takes 16 pounds of grain to produce one pound of beef.
- It takes an average of six pounds of plant protein to produce one pound of animal protein.
- About 54 kcal of fossil fuels are needed to produce one kcal of beef protein, compared to only three kcal for one kcal of protein from grain.
- One acre of land can produce 165 pounds of beef or 20,000 pounds of potatoes.^[3]



Shifting From Hunger to Surplus

If we reduced animal product consumption, we could produce a large food surplus worldwide. The approximately 800 million tons of grain fed to livestock globally each year is more than twice the amount needed to feed the 1.2 billion poorest people in the world.^[4] The increased efficiency of shifting toward more plant-based diets would also enable humanity to scale back industrial agriculture and choose more sustainable farming methods.

This potential is further illustrated by a University of Minnesota study that found that calories available for human consumption would increase by up to 70 percent if the grain used for animal feed and biofuels were instead used for direct human consumption. This would enable an additional four billion people to be fed with grain grown on existing farmland. It would be more than enough for the extra two billion people projected to be on Earth by 2050, *and all without expanding farmland.*^[5]



Obstacles

Almost none of this information is new. Almost 15 years ago, a UN Environmental Programme report caught headlines^[6] when it said, among other things, that rising incomes in China and other countries were causing increased consumption of meat and dairy products. As a result, a growing percentage of the global grain harvest is now fed to livestock. The report found that rising animal product consumption and population growth would drive increased hunger and severe environmental degradation.

It said, “A substantial reduction of [hunger and environmental degradation] would only be possible with a substantial worldwide diet change away from animal products.”

Though many more people are growing aware of this challenge and changing their diets, our population still has a long way to go. Until we achieve this dietary shift, humanity will face grave risks. Not only does the inefficiency of eating animal products contribute to global hunger, but it also jeopardizes our health, causes animal suffering, threatens to produce an unprecedented pandemic, and degrades environmental life support systems.

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