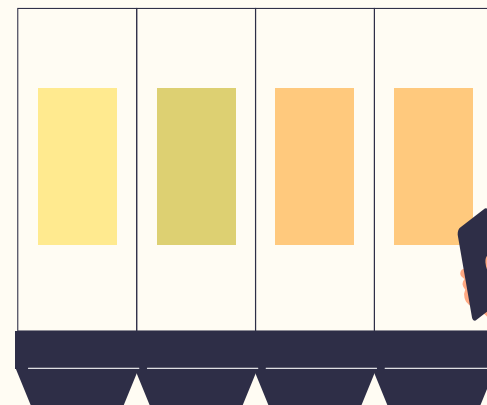
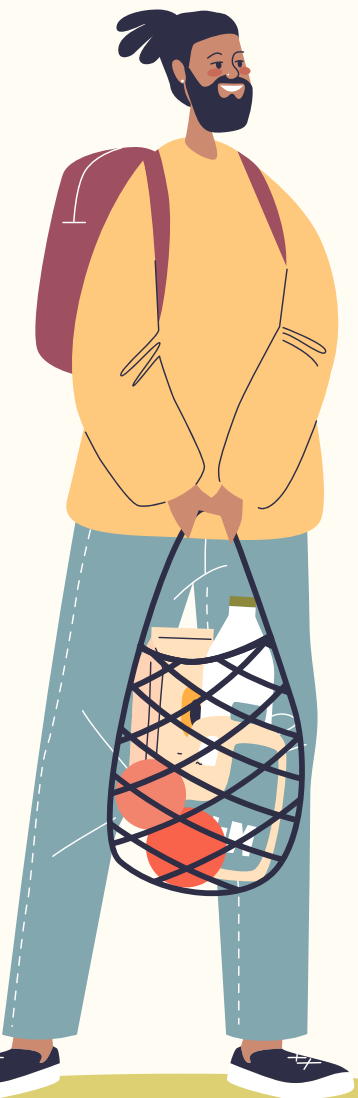




Plantastic Discoveries



BEING A MORE SUSTAINABLE FOOD CONSUMER



WHAT IS SUSTAINABILITY?

True sustainability spans across three dimensions:

* **Environmental** sustainability is the aim to reduce negative environmental impacts by conserving natural resources, reducing pollution, and maintaining biodiversity and soil health.



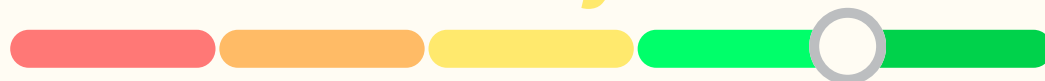
* **Economic** sustainability aims to support economic viability by ensuring practices that are economically beneficial for producers to adopt and maintain over the long-term



* **Social** sustainability refers to ensuring social responsibility, meaning it looks after the health and well-being of the communities involved in production, consumers and society as a whole



Because of this... **sustainability is a scale**



It's not black and white - it's about what is more or less sustainable in comparison to something else



In recent years, consumer interest in more sustainable products has grown significantly. More people are becoming aware of the environmental and social impact of their purchases, fueling a rising demand for more sustainable options.

However, making more sustainable food choices is not always easy. It can be difficult for consumers to identify what truly qualifies as more sustainable food—or these options may be less accessible due to cost, convenience, or ingrained habits and preferences.



BARRIERS TO MORE SUSTAINABLE FOOD CONSUMPTION

Despite good intentions, consumers face several obstacles:

ECONOMIC CONSTRAINTS

- * **Perceived Cost:** More sustainable foods are often viewed as more expensive, deterring purchase decisions.
- * **Actual Affordability:** In some cases, sustainable options are genuinely costlier due to production methods.



ACCESSIBILITY ISSUES

- * **Food Deserts:** Limited availability of fresh, more sustainable foods in certain areas makes it challenging for residents to make such choices.
- * **Seasonal Variability:** More sustainable options may not be available year-round, depending on the region.

INFORMATION OVERLOAD & MISLEADING

- * **Conflicting Messages:** Consumers receive mixed signals about what constitutes more sustainable eating, leading to confusion.
- * **Labeling Challenges:** Misleading or unclear labelling can result in misconceptions about a product's sustainability.
- * **Greenwashing in Food Marketing:** Many products use terms like “natural,” “eco-friendly,” or “green” without clear definitions or meaningful sustainability benefits.



HABITS & TRADITIONS

- * **Habitual Eating:** Established dietary habits are hard to change, even with awareness of sustainability issues.
- * **Cultural Preferences:** Traditional cuisines may rely on less sustainable ingredients, making dietary shifts challenging.

BEHAVIOURAL & POLICY BARRIERS

* **Nudging Towards Less Sustainable Choices:** The food environment often defaults to less sustainable options: unhealthy, high-impact foods are cheaper, more convenient, and heavily marketed.



* **Lack of Incentives for More Sustainable Choices:** Policies often fail to promote more sustainable options effectively, leaving them as niche products rather than the norm.

* **Voluntary Standards & Regulations:** Many sustainability initiatives rely on voluntary actions rather than systemic change.

THE "VALUE-ACTION" GAP IN MORE SUSTAINABLE FOOD CONSUMPTION

Although interest in more sustainable food is growing, studies show that consumer habits don't always align with their stated values.

Many individuals claim to prioritise sustainability in surveys, yet their purchasing habits often do not align with these values.

What are the contributing factors for this according to research?



- * **Convenience:** More sustainable options may require more effort to find and prepare.
- * **Taste Preferences:** Perceptions of inferior taste or quality in more sustainable foods can deter consumers.
- * **Social Influences:** Peer behaviours and societal norms heavily influence individual choices.

Bridging this gap requires not only consumer awareness but also systemic changes to make sustainable choices more accessible and appealing.



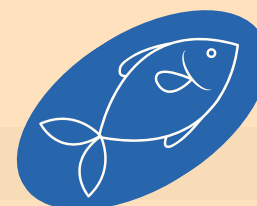
SUSTAINABILITY LABELLING

The European Union features over 200 distinct sustainability claims and labels for food products, creating a complex and often confusing landscape for consumers. These labels are designed to guide consumers toward more sustainable choices but vary significantly in criteria and credibility.



While some are official EU certifications, many are voluntary schemes, each with its own focus and limitations.

EU official certifications include the EU Ecolabel (which currently doesn't cover food products). Voluntary schemes include, the Fair Trade label and the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) label.





LABELLING LIMITATIONS

- * **Fragmentation and Overlap:** The multitude of labels can overwhelm consumers, leading to confusion and skepticism about their meanings and credibility.
- * **Variable Standards:** The lack of standardised criteria across labels means that sustainability claims can vary widely, making it challenging for consumers to make comparisons.
- * **Limited Scope:** Many labels focus on specific aspects of sustainability (e.g., environmental, social, or economic) without providing a holistic assessment of a product's overall impact. **But that is a huge task by itself, so it makes sense that the scope is limited to specific areas.**
- * **Greenwashing Risks:** Some labels may be used more as marketing tools than as indicators of genuine sustainability, potentially misleading consumers.



ABOUT GREENWASHING...

The EU is cracking down on greenwashing with new legislation!

In March 2024, the **Empowering Consumers for the Green Transition Directive** was adopted to ensure companies back up their environmental claims with solid data and prevent consumers from being misled.

So no more vague claims like “eco-friendly” or “green” without solid proof! By March 2026, all EU countries must implement these rules. Here’s what will change:



- * **Vague environmental claims will be prohibited unless substantiated by verified data**
- * **Only certified sustainability labels from recognised third parties will be allowed.**
- * **Carbon neutrality claims based on carbon offsetting will face stricter rules.**



This means clearer, more reliable information for consumers and higher standards for companies.

Greenwashing is a serious problem that misleads consumers. But beyond that, another challenge lies in the common misconceptions people have about what is truly sustainable.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS



MISCONCEPTION #1

ORGANIC FOODS ARE ALWAYS THE MOST SUSTAINABLE OPTION

While organic farming avoids synthetic pesticides, it relies on natural alternatives that can still have adverse environmental impacts. Moreover, organic produce often has a lower yield and typically requires more land to generate the same amount as conventional farming.



MISCONCEPTION #2

EATING LOCAL IS INHERENTLY BETTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

The environmental benefit of local food depends on various factors, including production methods and transportation efficiency. For instance, locally produced food in energy-intensive greenhouses may have a higher carbon footprint than food transported from regions where it is grown more efficiently. On average, transportation accounts for less than 10% of the total greenhouse gas emissions of food.



SO WHAT ACTUALLY IS MORE SUSTAINABLE FOOD?

To know what's more sustainable, it requires us to look at how food is produced, processed and distributed, as well as the broader environmental, economic and social impact.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

- * **Production Methods:** Farming practices should minimise water, soil, and energy use while preserving biodiversity, and reduce greenhouse emissions.
- * **Supply Chain Impact:** Transportation, packaging, and storage should reduce emissions and resource use.
- * **Waste Management:** Sustainable systems should address food waste and loss and its environmental consequences.



ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS

- * **Fair Compensation:** Farmers, workers, and producers should receive fair wages.
- * **Market Access: More** sustainable food should be available and accessible, not just a niche product.
- * **Regional Resilience:** Supporting local economies enhances food security and reduces dependency on vulnerable global supply chains. Prioritising food from short supply chains is a key part of this approach.



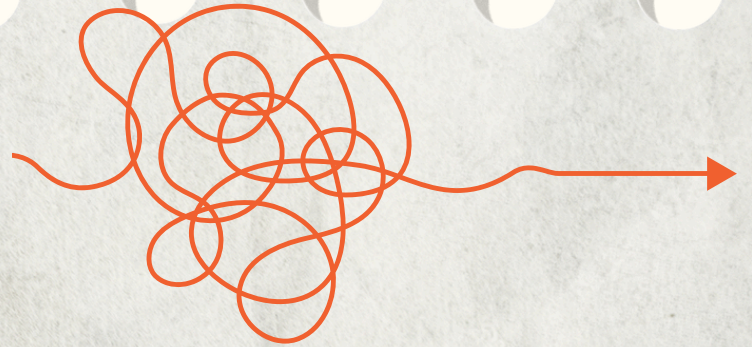
SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- * **Health & Nutrition: More** sustainable food should provide essential nutrients. It should also promote well-being, including that of the farming communities.
- * **Cultural Relevance:** Traditional food practices and dietary habits should be respected and integrated.
- * **Equitable Access:** A more sustainable food system ensures long-term food security for all populations.



Those are loads of considerations... so you understand why it is challenging to measure food sustainability

COMPLEXITY IN ASSESSMENT



Life Cycle Analysis (LCA): Evaluating the environmental impact of a food product from production to disposal is complex and varies by methodology.



Diverse Metrics: Sustainability encompasses various factors, including carbon footprint, water usage, and social impacts, making a single measurement challenging.



Data Variability: Inconsistent data across regions and farming practices complicates accurate assessments.

There is no universal method for measuring food sustainability; different models can lead to varying conclusions.



SO HOW TO BE A MORE SUSTAINABLE FOOD CONSUMER?

Becoming a more sustainable consumer isn't easy. Habits, limited availability, and the lack of positive nudging can all make sustainable choices more difficult. We also recognise that not everyone has the time to research every decision. And although many changes still need to happen at a policy level, here are some small practical tips for you to consider.

* Take a moment to really understand what food labels mean!

Do you know what it takes for a product to be labelled 'organic' or 'eco-friendly'? Research what standards food products must meet to earn these labels, and dig into research on what is truly more sustainable. Don't just believe the hype!



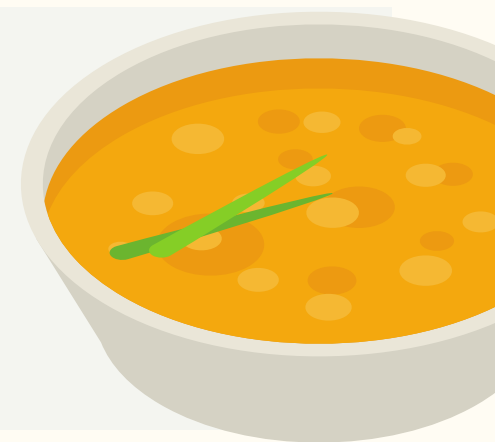
* Reduce Food Waste

Create meal plans and shopping lists to avoid over-purchasing. Learn proper food storage techniques to extend shelf life, and get creative with leftovers to minimise waste! (mushy bananas? make banana bread!)



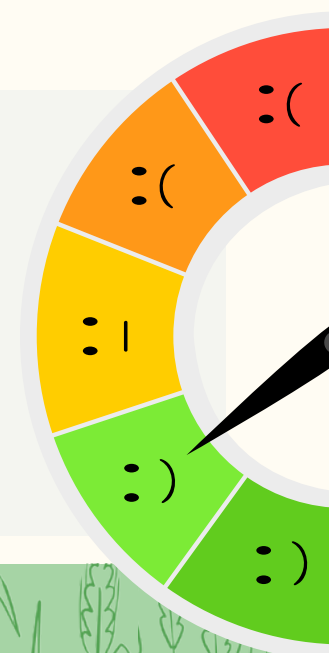
* Diversify your diet!

Incorporate a variety of nutrient-rich foods into your meals. Adding beans, lentils, and other legumes can boost your diet while reducing reliance on resource-intensive products.



* Be Mindful of Trade-offs

Consider the full spectrum of environmental, economic, and social impacts when making food choices. Sustainability exists on a scale. There's no perfect choice, only better decisions. Focus on progress, not perfection!



Sustainable eating requires us to consider a variety of factors and trade-offs. By going beyond what's commonly presented to us, exploring research, and advocating for genuine sustainability, we can make more informed choices. At an individual level, focus on balancing your diet, rather than every single product. All in all, this can help contribute to the shift toward a more sustainable food system.



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