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Sweden promotes climate-friendly food choices

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Guidelines for climate-friendly food choices developed by the Swedish authorities recommend citizens to reduce their meat and rice consumption as a way of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The first of their kind, the guidelines are now being sent out for reactions and inspiration from other EU countries.

Background:

According to the European Commission, the food and drink sector contributes to some 23% of global resource use, 18% of greenhouse gas emissions and 31% of acidifying emissions.

The European Environment Agency notes that agriculture puts most pressure on the environment during the food chain lifecycle, with beef and dairy production causing the highest emissions. Food processing is not seen as a significant contributor.

The main climate impact of the beef and dairy industry is methane produced by enteric fermentation from cattle. Methane is said to be over 20 times more powerful a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide.

A recent [report](#) by the Joint Research Centre shows that meat and dairy products contribute on average 24% to the environmental impact of total final consumption in the EU 27, while constituting only 6% of the economic value. The main improvement options identified lie in agricultural production and food management by households (avoidance of food wastage), and are related to power savings.

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"Meat – beef, lamb, pork and chicken – is the food group that has the greatest impact on the environment," state the [guidelines](#), jointly drafted by the Swedish National Food Administration and the country's Environmental Protection Agency.

The authorities note that Swedes' meat consumption has grown by an average ten kilos per person over the past ten years and now totals 65 kilos.

According to the World Bank, demand for food is expected to increase by 50% by 2050, and demand for meat by 85%, mainly as emerging economies like China and India become richer and adopt Western-style eating habits, rich in meat and dairy products.

The document, entitled 'Environmentally-smart Food Choices', recommend eating meat less often and in smaller quantities. "Try to exchange one or two meat dishes a week against vegetarian meals or decrease the quantity of meat," the document reads, explaining that such behaviour will lower people's climate-change footprint.

The document further lists various facts on the environmental impact of different foods. For example, one kilo of beef contributes up to 15-25 kilos of greenhouse gases - which is ten times more than the carbon footprint of the equivalent amount of chicken.

"Eating less meat, and making careful choices about what you eat, is therefore the smartest environmental choice you can make," the authorities state.

In addition to information on climate and the environment, the guidelines list the health aspects related to different foodstuffs, their recommended daily intake and the consequences of over-consumption. "With a few exceptions, healthy food choices can also go hand in hand with choices that are good for the environment," the guidelines read.

Foods covered include meat, fish, seafood, fruits, berries, starches, fats and even water. Recommendations range from eating seasonal, locally-produced fruits, vegetables and berries, avoiding bottled water, soda and palm oil and limiting rice consumption as its cultivation produces methane.

The Swedish authorities are the first in Europe to develop such recommendations. They will be sent out to other EU countries to gauge reactions before being released.

"Provided there are no serious objections," the process should be completed within three months, the authorities noted, hoping that the guidelines will inspire authorities in other countries to follow Sweden's example.

"Consumers make important environmental choices when they are food-shopping, so they need a sound basis on which to make their decisions. Food production accounts for roughly a quarter of Swedish consumers' climate-impacting emissions, and also contributes to other harmful environmental effects, for example through the use of pesticides," said Inger Andersson, director-general of the National Food Administration.

Links

European Union

- Commission: [Agriculture and climate change](#)
- Commission: [Identifying products with the greatest potential for environmental improvement](#)
- Joint Research Centre: [Environmental Impacts of Diet Changes in the EU](#) (June 2009)
- Joint Research Centre: [Environmental Improvement Potentials of Meat and Dairy Products](#) (August 2008)

Governments

- Swedish National Food Administration [website](#)

Business & Industry

- European Dairy Association (EDA): [The role of the EU dairy industry in the worldwide sustainability challenge](#) (4 June 2009)
- European Dairy Association (EDA): [European Dairy Association \(EDA\) aims for a sustainable dairy industry.](#) (4 June 2009)

Think-Tanks

- Worldwatch Institute: [Worldwatch Report: Mitigating Climate Change Through Food and Land Use](#)

Press articles

- Dnevnik: [Mесо е най-вредно за околната среда, сочи шведски наръчник за хранене](#)
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