

THE EU FOOD CHAIN:

WHERE ARE THE MOST PROFITS MADE & WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS?

From produce grown or raised on a farm, to ready to eat, drink or cook items in a shop, our food & drink passes through many stages, making different profit shares and impacting the planet throughout its journey.

This factsheet explores emissions and profits along the EU food chain and takes a closer look at some environmental impacts. It also dives into food sales and marketing, and looks at some solutions to make food more sustainable.

NON-FARM EMISSIONS: **47%**

Did you know that the carbon footprint of food production nearly doubles if you factor in the emissions along the food chain?

Farmers grow or raise produce

EMISSIONS FROM FARMING: **53%**

Processors transform & package

Transporters deliver food & drink

Wholesalers distribute products

Retailers sell the products we buy

PROFITS*

11.5%
▲
FARMERS

60.5%

◀ **PROCESSORS & RETAILERS** ▶
Account for the biggest profits along the food chain

28%

*Operating profits

GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

Greenhouse gas emissions from animal products, mostly cattle, account for **14-16%** of global emissions. In the EU, livestock farming for beef & dairy creates **77%** of methane emissions and **61%** of nitrous oxide emissions, which are **28** and **300** times more potent than CO₂ respectively.

BEEF
av. 20.5kg
CO₂ eq per kg

Beef produces the most GHG emissions per kilogram

CHEESE
av. 10kg
CO₂ eq per kg

Plant-based food & drink like soy drinks, tofu, and vegetarian burgers emit much less CO₂.

TOFU
av. 2.5kg
CO₂ eq per kg

Tomatoes

0.7kg CO₂ eq per kg
Greenhouse produced tomatoes

0.08kg CO₂ eq per kg
Field grown tomatoes

In cooler months, tomatoes are grown in heated, ultra-lit greenhouses which create a lot of emissions. Seasonal, field-grown tomatoes emit a lot less CO₂

Apples

Local food can* have a much smaller carbon footprint than imported food. For example, 1000kg of seasonal apples from New Zealand emits the same amount of CO₂ as 52 train trips from Paris to Amsterdam, while apples from Germany emit the same as 11 trips.

0.72kg CO₂ eq per kg

0.16kg CO₂ eq per kg

PARIS

AMSTERDAM

*Local doesn't necessarily mean more sustainable, especially if it's grown with pesticides!

LAND-USE

Land conversion from natural ecosystems to agriculture has historically been a large cause of greenhouse gas emissions, a major driver of biodiversity loss, deforestation and land degradation.

Farming covers nearly **40%** of the EU's land area, just over **70%** of this is for livestock grazing and fodder.

40%

70%

Animal feed

Eating animal products in Europe also has an impact outside the EU because our farm animals are frequently fed on imported soy.

80% of soy grown around the world is used in animal feed.

Almost half a football field of forest & grasslands are destroyed to produce the amount of beef eaten by an average European each year.

Did you know that most vegan soy products, like tofu, are made from soy produced in the EU? This means they generally do not contribute to deforestation in the Amazon, and they produce much less CO₂.

By replacing a beef burger with a soy burger, you reduce the emissions and land use impact by more than **80%**!

AIR POLLUTION

Air pollution from farming includes emissions from tractors and equipment, but livestock rearing produces the most pollution. Raising cattle, pigs, and chickens intensively releases vast amounts of methane, nitrous oxide, and ammonia into the atmosphere, harming the climate and human health.

Up to **93%** of ammonia pollution in the EU is linked to agriculture

PESTICIDES

Pesticides are a major contributor to pollinator decline, soil and water pollution, and ocean acidification. They also pose threats to our health.

Did you know that for every **€100** shopping basket of food, you eat an average of **22g** of pesticides? That's the equivalent to a handful of peanuts.

Keep pesticides out of your diet by buying organic or pesticide-free produce. Organic farming encourages high standards of animal welfare too.

ENVIRONMENTALLY-FRIENDLY FOOD: SALES, MARKETING & INVESTMENT



3.3%

OF TOTAL FOOD SALES IN THE EU ARE ORGANIC



0.4%

OF TOTAL FOOD SALES IN THE EU ARE PLANT-BASED ALTERNATIVES

Did you know that EU food companies spend **€3 billion** on marketing sustainable foods, compared to a staggering **€99 billion** on less sustainable and less healthy products like meat, dairy, snacks and soft drinks? It's not surprising that we're not eating so much of them!

Some large middle chain companies are not investing in sustainable activities. Less than 1% of their investments are spent on sustainable activities!*

*Activities aligned with the EU taxonomy - a classification system designed to identify which economic activities are environmentally sustainable under the European Green Deal.

TAKEAWAYS

POLICY CHANGES FOR A SUSTAINABLE FOOD TRANSITION

- Support the transition to healthy and sustainable diets by ensuring that sustainable and healthy food and drink is the most available, accessible, affordable, pleasurable and widely promoted.
- Ensure a fair distribution of revenue along the food chain so all players - including farmers - have access to a decent income and benefit from fair prices.
- Ensure greater transparency along the food chain through mandatory reporting on sourcing, pricing, distribution of profits and environmental impacts.
- Create new obligations for large food businesses so they improve the sustainability of the food supply chain.
- Adopt and implement a new EU law to transition to a sustainable EU food system with quantitative and binding targets, at both national and EU levels, in order to drive a just transition in how we produce, trade, process, and consume food.

TOP TIPS TO #EAT4CHANGE AND REDUCE THE IMPACT OF YOUR FOOD & DRINK

- Try to buy organic or pesticide-free food
- Eat less meat and more plant-based food
- Try to eat food that's in season in your region
- Check out where & how your food is produced - opt for sustainable & healthy food and drink rather than being swayed by marketing!



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