A PERFECT PAIR

Plant and Animal Foods in Sustainable Healthy Diets

Over the last 30 years, dietary guidelines around the world have shifted from a nutrient-based approach to a food-based approach. While each country’s guidance is unique, most recommend a variety of nutrient-rich foods from both plant and animal sources; particularly fruits, vegetables and dairy foods. More recently, many countries have recognized the need to shift to more sustainable food systems and have implemented sustainability principles into their dietary guidance.

Synergy between plant and animal foods

Plant and animal agriculture play a complementary role in supporting healthy diets and sustainable food systems. When combined, both sources of food provide an overlapping array of micronutrients, fiber and bioactive compounds that benefit human health. Furthermore, both dietary diversity and redundancy support the sustainability of ecological systems.

Beyond nutrition: a varied diet supports multiple sustainability domains

1. **Human health**: promoting the wellbeing of communities and societies
2. **Environment**: preserving our natural resources
3. **Social**: protecting cultural traditions and food justice
4. **Economic**: supporting jobs, local markets, and innovation

**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

1. **Beyond nutrients: bioactive compounds and the food matrix**
   - Plant foods offer phytosterols and polyphenols that can have anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties.
   - Certain dairy foods can offer immunoglobulins (antibodies), probiotics, and unique fatty acids that can have anti-inflammatory and immune-supporting effects.
   - The food matrix, or structural web of food compounds, influences how we digest and absorb nutrients. Combining different food groups, like plant and animal foods, can help optimize these benefits.

2. **Symbiotic agriculture: supporting sustainable food systems**

3. **Beyond nutrition: a varied diet supports multiple sustainability domains**

Plant and Animal foods Complement Each Other

Together, plant and animal-sourced foods contain the macronutrients (protein, carbohydrates and fats) and micronutrients (vitamins and minerals) we need. They're the true power couple.

Animal sourced foods tend to be higher in protein, branch chain amino acids, iodine, iron, zinc, vitamin B12 and choline.

Plant sourced foods tend to be higher in carbohydrates, fiber, vitamin A, vitamin C and other antioxidants.

Dairy foods can enhance plant-packed plates by adding nutrients, as well as satisfying flavor and texture.

No single food group can contribute adequate amounts or ideal ratios of the nutrients essential to human health, so pair plants with dairy foods for a superfood power couple.

### REFERENCES


4. Comerford, Kevin; Arndt, Channing; Drewnowski, Adam; Ericksen, Polly; Griffin, Timothy; Hendrickson, Mary; Ingram, John; and Nicholls, Jill. Proceedings of a workshop on characterizing and defining the social and economic domains of sustainable diets. Sustainability. 2020; 12(10): 4163. https://doi.org/10.3390/su12104163