



Planetary health on the menu

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“Food is the single
strongest lever to
optimize human
health and
environmental
sustainability on
Earth”

– EAT-LANCET

READ TO

- Understand how our menus can improve the health of the planet
- Adapting the food on our plates
- Help drive the socio-ecological transition

Concept at a glance

Planetary health menus and harvests invite us to think differently about our food, from farm to plate. According to the definition adapted from the EAT-Lancet report, “planetary health” involves considering both the production of food (harvests) and consumption choices (menus) while taking into account the impacts on our health, environment and wallets.



ABCs OF PLANETARY HEALTH MENUS AND HARVESTS

Adapting our menus to a new reality

How will we feed a population that will reach 10 billion people by 2050 a healthy diet within planetary boundaries? That's the question scientists around the world were tasked with answering in 2019 through the lenses of fields such as human health, agriculture, political science and environmental sciences.

This vast project, led by the EAT-Lancet Commission, explored not only the quantity of food available to feed humans, but also the nutritional quality of the food we consume and the impacts generated by its production.

The experts came to the conclusion that **food systems have a crucial role to play in improving human and planetary health.** They called for coordinated, science-based action. And there is not a moment to lose: change must begin right now so that our food enhances human health while remaining within planetary boundaries.

Équiterre has opted not to use the Commission's phrase "planetary health diets" to avoid any reference to food restrictions. Instead, we will substitute the phrase "Planetary health harvests and menus" to reference the food on our table, the type of crops harvested, and agricultural practice in the field.

Fortunately, all agreed that the transition to a planetary health diet, based on a healthy, sustainable food system, is possible!

Two universal scientific objectives were identified to effectively mobilize available forces:



ADOPTING
a more diverse,
vegetable-rich diet

FOSTERING
sustainable food
production

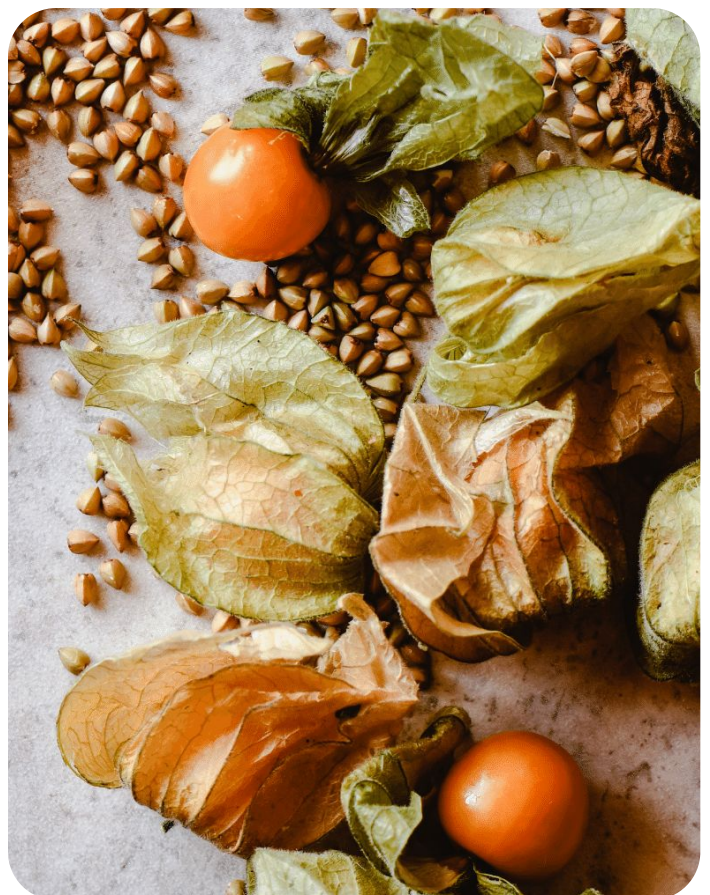
Big picture: the socio-economic issues

At a time when global food production is keeping pace with demographic growth, over 820 million people are experiencing **malnutrition**. Meanwhile, 2.4 billion people are experiencing health issues linked with **overconsumption** or harmful food habits. All in all, the food eaten by over half the world's population is nutritionally deficient. The risks of premature morbidity and mortality stem more from nutritional **imbalances** than from unprotected sex, alcohol consumption, drugs and tobacco combined.

What is more, the **inflation** rates we are currently experiencing have hiked up the cost of food, making it less accessible. At the same time, we are seeing increasing food shortages associated with **climate disruption** and geopolitical conflicts. Multiple **tactics** have emerged on the supply side to save on production costs and grocery bills. In this context, the price of food becomes a priority in consumption choices, with nutritional quality and environmental considerations about issues like production or processing taking a back seat to cost. While we await a return to food price stability, there are numerous ways to make healthy, sustainable and affordable choices.

Choose the Canada Food Guide

Canada's Food Guide offers a very similar menu to the one recommended by the EAT-Lancet Commission, highlighting food that is good for human health and that of the planet. These values appear everywhere in the latest version of **Canada's Food Guide**, which was prepared for the first time without industry influence. This guide to **healthy eating** is a strong tool with which to transform our eating habits.



**Have plenty of
vegetables and fruits**

Eat protein foods

**Make water
your drink
of choice**

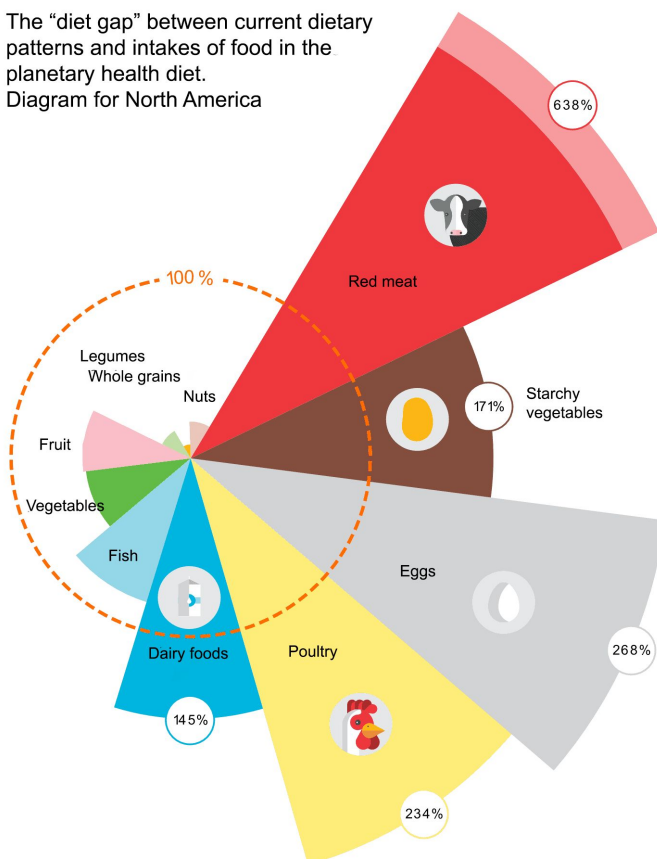
**Choose
whole grain
foods**



The ideal meal proposed by the guide recommends major changes to our menus, especially in North America. It recommends that we¹:

- Cut back considerably on meat consumption:
 - ◆ 90 per cent less beef and pork
 - ◆ 70 per cent less poultry
- Reduce sugar consumption by 60 per cent
- Eat 58 per cent more vegetables
- Eat 251 per cent more legumes

The “diet gap” between current dietary patterns and intakes of food in the planetary health diet.
Diagram for North America



To be sure, these objectives are ambitious, and achieving them will require effort.. So, let’s roll up our sleeves and get to work! We have a long way to go to get from the current **food system** to the proposed new system. This is what we mean when we talk about a **dietary gap**.

Despite the challenges, most experts maintain that this transition is 100 per cent achievable. But these changes must be implemented on a global scale and in many areas at once to obtain meaningful results. In order to ensure **sustainable planetary food**, action must be taken immediately.

¹ The EAT-Lancet Commission Summary Report.
https://eatforum.org/content/uploads/2019/07/EAT-Lancet_Commission_Summary_Report.pdf

7 GOOD REASONS TO ACT

A radical transformation of the global food system is urgently needed

- EAT-LANCET

1. Improve the health of the population

Over \$80 billion is spent every year in Canada on health care for chronic diseases like diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease and cancer. A healthy lifestyle, including healthy and balanced nutrition, could make it possible to eliminate up to 80 percent of these diseases². That's why healthy food must be made more available, accessible and affordable. If this is can be combined with improved **food literacy**, a solid grasp of **sustainable agricultural practices** and science-based food guidelines – as is the case with the most recent edition of Canada's Food Guide – our chances of success will increase significantly! A good start would be to eat **whole foods** that are less processed and contain less fat, salt and added sugar.

“A flexitarian shift would help save nearly 70,000 lives annually in Canada, mainly through a reduced risk of chronic non-transmissible diseases caused by obesity”, stated Brent Loken, one of the co-authors of the EAT-Lancet Commission report, at a Montreal conference in March 2023.



² Statistique Canada (2020). Added, free and total sugar content and consumption of foods and beverages in Canada.

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/82-003-x/2020010/article/00002-eng.htm>

2. Mitigating the climate/biodiversity crises

Scientists have proven over and over that food waste is a leading cause of biodiversity loss. If we do not change our methods of agricultural production, this loss will accelerate. Moreover, **80 per cent of the planet's farmland** is used to raise livestock. The food system alone is responsible for **34 per cent of the world's GHG emissions**. The best way to reduce food's environmental impact is to avoid or at least reduce consumption of red meat and dairy products. Another way is to stop the overuse of farmland to produce foods that are increasingly calorie-rich but nutrient-poor, such as potato chips. In contrast, it has been shown that sustainable agricultural practices like crop diversification are good for soil health and help combat climate change and biodiversity loss.



3. Lowering our grocery bills \$

A number of studies have illustrated the economic benefits of **plant-based foods**, especially when they replace red meat. Plant-based protein sources, such as legumes, soy-based products, nuts and seeds, are relatively inexpensive ways of enhancing food quality. For example, researchers compared the prices of legumes (\$5.76/kg) and meat (\$11.90/kg), finding legumes **cost only half as much**.

Other strategies can help lower the cost of healthy food include eating according to your needs, **choosing seasonal food, preserving food** when it is plentiful and cooking using **ingredients that have undergone little or no processing**. You can also follow promotions or get inspired by culinary methods featuring more plant proteins, which can lower your food costs and allow you to discover new flavours.

4. Contributing to the economic vitality of the local agricultural community

Encouraging people to buy locally produced food benefits the entire agricultural sector! Job creation and the development of new markets are positive things and generate benefits, including crop diversification – an effective way to curbing the loss of biodiversity – and by reducing food miles thanks to **local marketing**. For the many consumers seeking out **local food**, there's good news: a recent study by Dalhousie University shows that 55.6 percent of locally produced food in Quebec is advantageously priced, despite inflation.



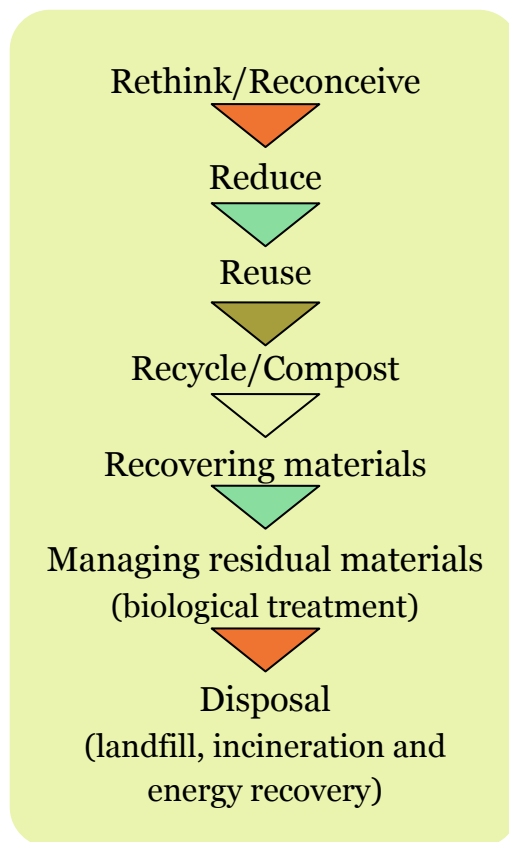
5. Reducing food waste

A third of food produced is wasted and will never end up on our plates! This food is thrown out at various points along the **supply chain**. There is no justification for food waste in a global food system that should be fair and accessible, optimizing natural resources while protecting biodiversity and ecosystems. The goal proposed by the authors of the EAT-Lancet study is to cut **food waste** by 50 per cent, in line with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Several waste-cutting actions have been identified, such as improving post-harvest infrastructures and the transport, processing and packaging of food products. Also, awareness must be raised among various stakeholders, both from the standpoint of producers and consumers. The time to act is now, since it is estimated that global food waste is responsible for 8-10 per cent of total GHG emissions. And that's not all! By eating foods low in nutritional value, we are wasting our precious resources!

6. Reducing waste generated by food production

A planetary health menu also means reducing waste generated throughout the food **life cycle**. The target is high: a 50 per cent reduction in waste, such as packaging. A good way forward is to follow the **zero-waste hierarchy**.

The first step in achieving structural change is to **rethink** and better design packaging and the methods for distributing and marketing food. Consumers should observe certain priorities, such as **reducing food packaging** by buying in bulk, **reusing** packaging and avoiding single-use packaging and **overpackaged** food³.



7. Act in solidarity

Solidarity can be achieved on both a Quebec and a global scale, since planetary health menus and harvests can feed every human being on earth a healthy diet by 2050, all while protecting our planet. This must also extend to the food on Quebecers' plates by incorporating dishes from different food traditions that use healthy, affordable and sustainable ingredients and reflecting our rich cultural diversity. This can create a way to add new flavours and new recipes to our planetary health menu.

³ To learn more, see the Équiterre study on [Solutions to reduce the amount of packaging used by Canadian food retailers](#).

“Returning to nutritionally rich, basic food ingredients that are minimally processed and packaged, modifying the composition of the food on our plates (particularly by reducing animal protein), lowering food waste and varying the supply sources (local, fewer intermediaries, discount stores, etc.) allow people to recentre their food on nutritional needs and better control their spending on food.”

– COLLEEN THORPE

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ÉQUITERRE



To improve human health and the sustainability of our environment, all individual and collective actions count. But the proposed changes are more impactful when they are combined with public policies. Équiterre has launched a number of appeals to governments in recent years to address the composition of our menus and prioritize our farmland. These campaigns have led to major accomplishments. Here are just a few:

Strengthening our food autonomy

Since the current food system does not foster food autonomy in Quebec, Équiterre and its partners commissioned a study carried out by the Institut de recherche en économie contemporaine (IRÉC), which includes a series of recommended solutions. To improve our food autonomy, we must change what is on our plates: reducing the amount of ultra-processed foods and incorporating more grains and legumes produced in Quebec. In addition to being good for our health, these food items help diversify the crops in our fields and improve soil health.

Protecting our farmland and the people who grow our food

To counter the forces of land speculation and urban sprawl that are eating away at our valuable farmland, we and our partners launched the Alliance SaluTERRE. Its multiple objectives include improving agricultural soil health while respecting our ecosystems; preserving their nutritional function; and ensuring their accessibility for a new and diverse generation of farmers.

Providing children with access to healthy, sustainable and affordable meals at school

Since Canada is the only G7 country without a universal school food program, the **Bien manger à l'école** program mobilizes Quebecers and raises their awareness about the creation of a universal school food program in Quebec (PASUQ). In 2024, Canada took a major step regarding school food. The announcement of a historic \$1 billion investment over five years towards school food sent a signal that creating a universal school food program in Quebec is possible.



Educating our young about healthy, local and environmentally responsible food

In 2023, over 22,000 youth workers visited the Marmite éducative, the only platform dedicated to food education in Quebec. Équiterre also continued its support work with a hundred schools that chose to put more local food on their menu.

Encouraging institutions to use locally-sourced food

Commun'assiette, a project dedicated towards sourcing sustainable food in institutions, is expanding. In addition to equipping and coordinating food services (mainly in the Montreal region), this project expanded to the Montérégie region in 2023. Équiterre has also offered support services to the CHU de Québec-Université Laval and the CISSS de l'Outaouais to boost their sustainable food service supply.



Fund agri-environmental programs

After years of political pressure, Quebec is now offering farms financial incentives to adopt agri-environmental practices since 2022. We mobilized the population and are now lobbying Ottawa to offer similar support.

Emergence of agricultural crops strengthening our agri-food system

In view of the need to develop agricultural crop networks that benefit human and planetary health, Équiterre launched the Bean project (Projet Haricot). This initiative seeks to spur demand for local dry beans in Quebec institutions and increase supplies offered by farmers and other intermediaries.

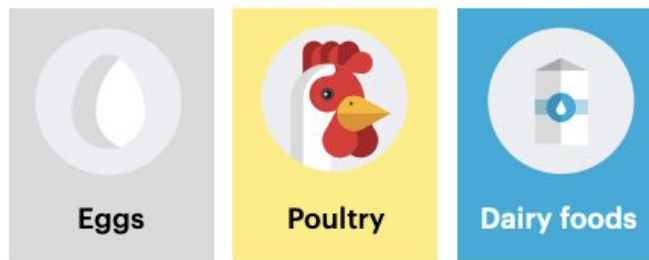


WHAT ARE WE PUTTING ON OUR PLATES?

Limited intake



Optional foods



Emphasized foods



So, in concrete terms, what do we do now? The table below offers an overview of the foods Canadians should eat every day, which foods we should reduce or limit as much as possible, and what should only be on our plates on special occasions. This is a good place to start. To make good choices and better understand the underlying principles, just follow this recipe! It's made up of three groups of simple, accessible ingredients, and everyone can try it!

Ingredients

- Half (50 per cent) should be fruits and vegetables;
- A quarter (25 per cent) whole grains (e.g. hullless oats, buckwheat, barley quinoa, etc.)
- The other quarter (25 per cent) diverse proteins, ideally plant-based, as recommended by Health Canada (e.g. beluga lentils, red, black, white and all colours of beans, tofu, nuts, etc.).

Menus can vary according to regional and cultural specificities, particularly in northern communities.

Traditional foods in Indigenous communities, from activities like hunting and fishing, are entirely compatible with sustainable food from both a human health and environmental standpoint.



Vegetables and fruit
**Organic
And Local**



Protein foods
**Mostly
Plant-Based**

Recipe to follow

- **Use unprocessed or minimally processed ingredients**
e.g. whole grains, legumes
- **Avoid waste**
e.g. buy only what you need, make preserves when certain foods are in season, reuse all your leftovers by cooking at home as often as possible, use all the parts of the food you cook (or as much as possible), such as using celery leaves in your soup, etc.
- **Choose foods with little or no packaging**
e.g. buy in bulk, opt for reusable packaging, avoid overpackaging

The path to affordable food

- Try to cook at home as often as possible!
- Use tools like the Toogoodtogo and FoodHero apps
- Stay on the lookout for grocery store specials and plan your meals accordingly
- Plan your meals: cook in large quantities and store the leftovers in the freezer for the rest of the week
- Prioritize whole foods, seasonal foods and plant-based foods
- Take advantage of low-priced seasonal fruits and vegetables or choose unsalted frozen or canned vegetables (pre-rinsed, with no added salt)
- Cook simply, using recipes without many ingredients
- Join community kitchens and/or a purchasing group



A TYPICAL DAILY MENU FOR PLANETARY HEALTH

Breakfast

A bowl of granola, plant-based milk, and a smoothie made from seasonal fruits and vegetables

Lunch

Split pea soup, whole grain bread, shredded vegetable salad, fresh fruit and dark chocolate

Dinner

Vegetarian chili, Quebec barley, green salad and a seasonal fruit crumble

Snacks

Hummus and raw veggies (carrots and other seasonal vegetables), homemade energy bars and seasonal fruit

+15 favourite foods

→ **Fresh, seasonal fruits and vegetables**

→ **Whole grains and local plant-based proteins:**

- ◆ hullless oats
- ◆ lentils
- ◆ buckwheat
- ◆ spelt, barley
- ◆ rye
- ◆ dry beans
- ◆ soya
- ◆ flaxseed
- ◆ yellow peas
- ◆ nuts and sunflower seeds
- ◆ sprouted seeds
- ◆ seaweed

These foods are at the heart of a planetary health menu and should be at the top of your grocery list.

Recipes to add to your favourites!

- [17 inexpensive legume-based recipes](#) (Radio-Canada - Mordu)
- [Legume-based recipe](#) (Ricardo)
- [Quebec fruit and vegetable recipe cards](#) (Équiterre)
- [Two weeks of EAT-Lancet menus](#) (Batra)
- Devour Eve-Lyne Auger's legumes
- Planetary health diet of Hélène Schernberg and Louise Browaeys
- [Fattoush salad recipe](#) (Les Filles Fattoush)
- [Chorbet elades recipe – Coral lentil soup](#) (Les Filles Fattoush)

Checklist



Planetary health harvests and menus are:

- Sustainable and respectful of our planet
- Good for your health
- Good for community vitality, your health and your wallet
- Encourage others! – Planetary health harvests and menus are capable of feeding all the population a healthy diet by 2050 while protecting our planet

Our choices dictate our actions:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| + vegetables on our plates | - less processed food |
| + plant-based proteins | - less packaging |
| + whole foods | - less food waste |
| + local and seasonal foods | |
| + sustainably produced food | |

To learn more

Équiterre

- [How Canada's Food Guide combines healthy eating with climate action](#)
- [Toward a better understanding of healthy food autonomy](#)
- [Ideas on how to feed Quebecers a healthy, sustainable diet](#)
- [All you need to know about sustainable food](#)
- [Reduce animal-based proteins](#)
- Healthy, local and environmentally responsible food in institutions can also be leveraged, as evidenced by Équiterre's work in connection with such projects as [Local food in Quebec's schools](#), [Farm to school Quebec](#), [Commun'assiette](#), and the [Bean project](#).



Other

- [EAT-Lancet Commission Summary Report](#)
- [50 foods for a healthier people and a healthier planet \(WWF-UK\)](#)
- [Voici les planétariens \(La Presse\)](#)
- [Protéger la biodiversité en mangeant moins de viande \(Le Devoir\)](#)
- [Comment et pourquoi revoir notre consommation de viande avec le régime santé planétaire \(Châtelaine\)](#)
- [Pour une autonomie alimentaire saine et durable \(Caribou\)](#)

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