Food sustainability: Problems, perspectives and solutions

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Abstract:

The global food system makes a significant contribution to climate changing greenhouse gas emissions with all stages in the supply chain, from agricultural production through processing, distribution, retailing, home food preparation and waste, playing a part. It also gives rise to other major environmental impacts, including biodiversity loss and water extraction and pollution. Policy makers are increasingly aware of the need to address these concerns, but at the same time they are faced with a growing burden of food security and nutrition-related problems, and tasked with ensuring that there is enough food to meet the needs of a growing global population. In short, more people need to be fed better, with less environmental impact. How might this be achieved? Broadly, three main 'takes' or perspectives, on the issues and their interactions, appear to be emerging. Depending on one’s viewpoint, the problem can be conceptualised as a production challenge, in which case there is a need to change how food is produced by improving the unit efficiency of food production; a consumption challenge, which requires changes to the dietary drivers that determine food production; or a socio-economic challenge, which requires changes in how the food system is governed. This paper considers these perspectives in turn, their implications for nutrition and climate change, and their strengths and weaknesses. Finally, an argument is made for a reorientation of policy thinking which uses the insights provided by all three perspectives, rather than, as is the situation today, privileging one over the other.

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Resource Description

Cross-cutting Themes: Mitigation, Health Sector Influence, Vulnerable Population, Sociodemographic Vulnerability, Climate Justice or Climate Equity

Exposure: weather or climate related pathway by which climate change affects health  

Food Quality, Food Security  

Food Quality: Nutritional quality  

Food Security: Food access/ distribution

Geographic Feature: resource focuses on specific type of geography
Geographic Location: resource focuses on specific location

Global or Unspecified Location

Health Impact: specification of health effect or disease related to climate change exposure

Diabetes/Obesity, Malnutrition

Resource Type: format or standard characteristic of resource

Review Article

Adaptation: Secondary Health Impacts of Adaptation, Vulnerability Assessment, Intervention

Mitigation: Secondary Health Impacts of Mitigation