



HEALTH NOTES



amen
Adventist Medical
Evangelism Network

AMEN's mission is to motivate, train, and equip Seventh-day Adventist health-care professionals to team with pastors and members, uniting the church to restore Christ's ministry of healing to the world, hastening His return.

To learn more about AMEN and get involved go to: amensda.org.

Principal contributor: Elvin Adams, MD

Health and Environmental Impacts of Foods

Food choices affect human health in profound ways. Many fail to realize that food choices also impact the environment in equally profound ways. Nine of the top 15 risk factors for the global disease burden result from poor dietary quality. Major diseases affected by poor food choices include coronary heart disease, type II diabetes, stroke, and colorectal cancers which collectively account for about 40% of global mortality.

On the other hand, agricultural food production emits about 30% of global greenhouse gases, occupies 40% of Earth's land surface, causes nutrient pollution that alters ecosystems and water quality, and accounts for 70% of the Earth's freshwater use from river, reservoirs, and ground water. Food production has other negative environmental affects as well.

A fascinating article examines specific classes of foods and measures their impact on health as well as their impact on the environment.¹ The foods selected included: whole grains, fruits, vegetables, nuts, legumes, potatoes, refined grains, fish, dairy, eggs, chicken, unprocessed red meat, processed red meat, sugar sweetened beverages (SSBs), and olive oil.

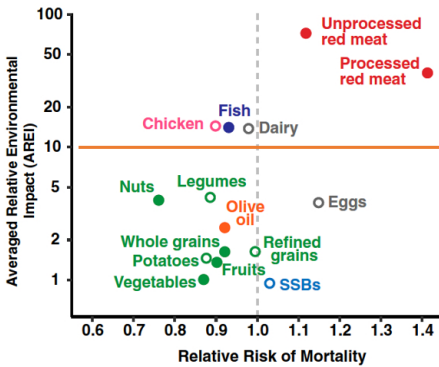
The impact these foods had on health were measured in terms of all causes of death (total mortality), coronary heart disease, colorectal cancer, diabetes and stroke.

The impact the growth and production of these foods had on the environment were measured in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, acidification of the environment, water use required, land usage, and excessive richness of nutrients in water, due to runoff which causes a dense growth of plant life and death of animal life from lack of oxygen.

It turns out that the foods that are best for your health have the least impact on the environment. Whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and legumes have great health benefits and a very favorable impact on the environment. Nuts require a lot of water but this is offset by their exceptional health benefits.

Dairy, eggs, fish, and chicken have moderate impacts on the environment but they are significantly worse than those of plant foods. Their impacts on health are not as beneficial as those of plant foods.

The worst foods for health are processed and unprocessed red meats. These also have the greatest adverse impact on the environment. These relationships are captured in this graph.



Items whose circle is to the right of the dashed midline are not good for your health. Items above the orange line are not good for the environment.

The best quadrant from which to derive food choices is the left lower quadrant. It is amazing that the foods that God outlined for us to eat way back in Genesis just happen to also be best for the environment.

Review the original plant-based diet in Genesis 2 and 3.

ELLEN WHITE respected the farming environment. She recognized the need to use land responsibly and to improve its condition with use.

"To develop the capacity of the soil requires thought and intelligence. Not only will it develop muscle, but capability for study, because the action of brain and muscle is equalized. We should so train the youth that they will love to work upon the land, and delight in improving it. *Fundamentals of Education* 322.

To eat a plant based diet is best for your health and reflects a healthy respect and responsibility to preserve the environment that has been entrusted to our care and keeping.

¹Michael A. Clark, et al, "Multiple health and environmental impacts of foods," Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, September 24, 2019, 6 pages.