

## **New studies show Irish diet is unsustainable – nutritionally, financially and ethically**

The Irish diet is rich in unsustainable foods and is causing nutritional and financial problems – as well as seriously limiting our potential to limit the effects of global warming and nitrogen pollution. However, the new research that pinpoints these worries also finds that we could make major improvements if adopting the [EAT-Lancet ‘planetary healthy’ reference diet](#).

The findings are explored in detail in two new reports published by researchers from Trinity College Dublin’s School of Natural Sciences.

In [one of the papers, the team performed a nutri-economic assessment of the Irish diet](#) by comparing it with the EAT-Lancet Commission ‘planetary healthy’ reference diet using both FAO statistics and diet survey data from the [Irish Universities National Adult Nutrition Survey](#).

The EAT-Lancet Commission ‘planetary healthy’ reference diet essentially states that global consumption of fruits, vegetables, nuts and legumes will have to double while we reduce consumption of red meat and sugar if we are to feed 10 billion people by 2050.

### **Key findings**

- The Irish diet is rich in unsustainable food items
- Alcohol consumption accounts for less than 7% of calorie intake but 25% of daily cost for Irish adults
- Multiple sources of animal protein in our diets, such as farmed fish, pork and lamb, score poorly from a nutritional-financial cost perspective
- Adopting the EAT-Lancet ‘planetary healthy’ reference diet could result in major financial savings per capita per day, increased nutritional density of diet, and up to 57% reduction in diet associated Global Warming Potential (GWP) and Eutrophication (EP) scores

**Professor Mike Williams, lead author of both reports, Trinity, said:**

“Global diets have become more ‘westernised,’ less healthy and more damaging to the environment. Over consumption of nutritionally poor foods, has led to a global crisis in obesity, diabetes, cardiac disease and colon cancer, while the global food industry has failed the environment in terms of global warming and nitrogen pollution in particular. The

agriculture sector accounts for 26% of global warming, and in terms of mitigating the effects of agricultural nitrogen pollution, costs each European approx. \$1000 a year (European Nitrogen Assessment, 2011).

Effective change can be achieved only through education. Our research hopefully adds to the considerable database on sustainable foods, sustainable diets and informed dietary choice, but with an Irish perspective.

In the [other paper the team looked at the European landscape](#) beyond the Irish borders and discovered broadly similar patterns.

### Key findings

- As countries get 'richer', meat consumption increases and the 'healthfulness' of diets declines
- It is almost the case that no Mediterranean country now has a 'Mediterranean diet' – traditionally comprising lots of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and some seafood
- The European diet is particularly unsustainable given the dependency on red meat, cereals, dairy and animal fats
- Alcohol consumption is almost five times the calorie intake of legumes
- Adopting the EAT-Lancet 'planetary healthy' reference diet could result in per capita per day decreases of up to 50% in reduction in diet associated Global Warming Potential (GWP) and Eutrophication (EP) scores

Both reports are freely available:

- [A combined environmental and nutri-economic assessment of diets](#)
- [The environmental assessment of diets](#)

Professor Williams is the lead author of both, with Sophie Saget, Michael Suttle, Bethan O'Driscoll and Muireann Cotter— present post- and undergraduate students from Trinity – co-authors.

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**Trinity Media Relations Contact**

**Thomas Deane**

Media relations officer

Trinity College Dublin

Email: [deane@tcd.ie](mailto:deane@tcd.ie) | Tel: 01 896 4685 / 086 787 0748

### **Additional Notes to Editors**

For more information about the EAT-Lancet Commission 'planetary healthy' reference diet, see: <https://bit.ly/3b3N9WV>

For more information about the diet survey data (from the Irish Universities National Adult Nutrition Survey) is available from <https://bit.ly/3ehk7oK>