

Many young adults value sustainably produced foods, leading to healthier food choices

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Sustainable diets have many benefits in having a minimal impact on the environment, contributing to food security and promoting healthy life for present and future generations. Research focusing on selected components of sustainable diets, such as eating food that is organically grown/produced, minimally processed, locally grown, and not genetically modified, has found that individuals who are more aware of where and how food is produced tend to select more nutrient-dense food choices.

University of Minnesota School of Public Health researchers examined the continuity of supporting sustainable diet practices from adolescence to adulthood and how it is related to food choices. Their findings were recently published in the journal *Public Health Nutrition*.

Researchers used data from [Project EAT](#), a population-based study of eating- and weight-related outcomes that has followed [young people](#) in Minnesota from adolescence to adulthood. Project EAT participants completed mailed/online surveys about their support for sustainable diet practices, eating behaviors, and usual food and beverage intake in 2003-2004 (late adolescence/[early adulthood](#), age 15-23 years) and 2015-2016 (young adulthood, age 28-34 years). The four sustainable diet practices assessed were organically grown/produced, not processed, locally grown, and not genetically modified.

The study found:

- 11 percent of participants reported supporting two or more practices in late adolescence/early adulthood and 34 percent

- reported supporting two or more practices in young adulthood;
- 18 percent of participants reported supporting two or more practices in both late adolescence/early adulthood and young adulthood;
- supporting two or more practices was associated with preparation of meals with vegetables at least a few times/week, less frequent purchase of family meals from [fast food restaurants](#) and higher diet quality in [young adulthood](#).

"The results of the study are in line with our hypothesis that supporting sustainable diet practices is related to more frequent preparation of meals with vegetables and multiple markers of better diet quality, such as higher intake of fruits and vegetables," said Nicole Larson, a nutritional epidemiologist and registered dietitian who co-authored the study. "Our findings suggest it is likely that addressing the environmental sustainability of food choices as part of public health messaging to promote healthy dietary behaviors would be received as relevant by many young adults, including nutritionally vulnerable groups with limited resources for food purchasing."

The results may also have important implications for healthcare providers. According to Larson, it may be helpful for health professionals to routinely ask about sustainable food practices when providing dietary advice.

Larson recommends that future related studies examine:

- how supporting sustainable diet practices may be related to health concerns and events;
- the inclusion of sustainable diet practices into public health programs promoting nutrient-dense food choices; and
- how parents transmit values regarding sustainable [diet](#) practices to their children.

More information: Nicole Larson et al. Do young adults value sustainable diet practices? Continuity in values from adolescence to adulthood and linkages to dietary behaviour, *Public Health Nutrition* (2019). [DOI: 10.1017/S136898001900096X](https://doi.org/10.1017/S136898001900096X)

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