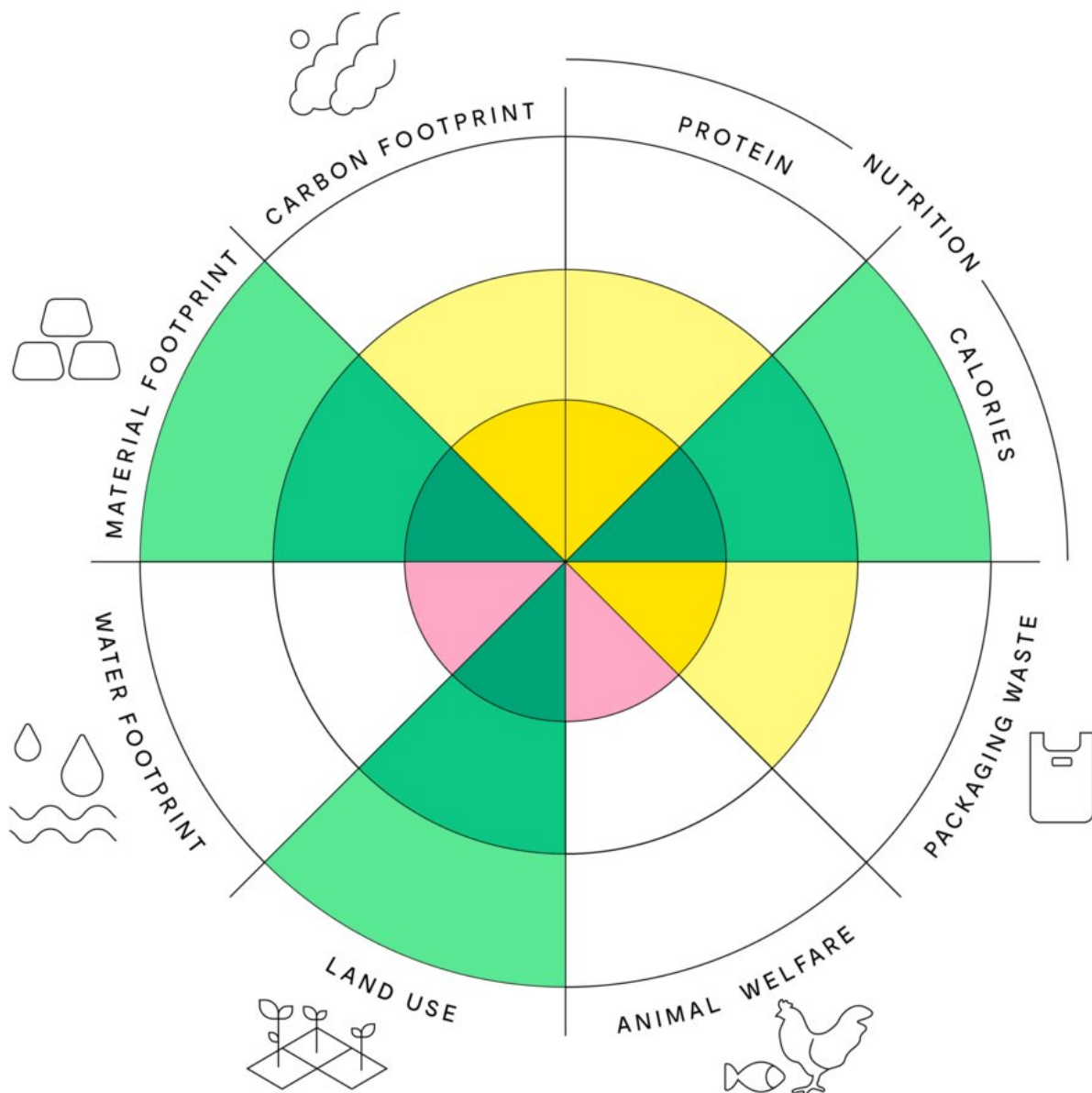# Medical Xpress

New technologies can help people make sustainable dietary decisions

August 2 2022

The Food Wellbeing Index aims to display the consequences of food choices in an easy to understand manner.

Aalto researchers have developed and tested a pilot app to help consumers evaluate their food choices. The study is part of the EU-ATRACA project which aims to create and promote "anti-rival tokens," a blockchain-based technology that encourages the sharing of digital goods.

Though consumers are increasingly concerned about the environmental and health impacts of their [food](#) choices, many people are unsure what changes they should make. People often feel that they don't have enough information to guide their decisions, and it's also hard to see the impact of individual consumption habits. The Food Futures research project, led by Visiting Researcher S. M. Amadae of the Department of Communications and Networking, addresses these challenges by providing clear information on costs and benefits, and aggregating individual choices so their combined effect becomes apparent.

Design researchers from Aalto's Creative Sustainability Program developed a Food Wellbeing Index to capture the social, environmental, health, and economic consequences of food choices. The index integrates several variables to give a holistic overview which reflects the sustainability impact of a dietary choices. In the long run, the integrity and transparency of this information can be supported through the use of blockchain throughout the supply chain.

Building this information into an app gives consumers clear and easily actionable information, as was seen in a [pilot study](#) at the University of

Helsinki's Unicafe restaurants. "For vegan-curious participants, the index influenced rethinking their meal [choice](#) after viewing the impact on various variables, making them feel empowered to make a positive change," says Shreya Sood, who developed the [index](#) together with Ruta Jumite. "Vegan participants, on the other hand, got a sense of being appreciated for their default choices."

For some users, the app provided new insights about the impact of certain foods. "For example, many participants said the app was an eye-opener about the high emissions associated with cheese," says Sood, noting that the app helped people begin to question their assumptions about certain protein sources.

In addition to giving users [information](#) to guide their individual decision, the app also uses anti-rival blockchain tokens and a distributed ledger to measure and aggregate choices, showing users how individual actions add up to a collective effect. Because the aggregated data reflect the [food choices](#) and aspirations of the community, they can be used to identify gaps and shortcomings that need to be addressed by policy-making in to order to meet sustainability goals.

The blockchain tools are also used to reward individual choices. In the long run, the researchers say these tools could provide [policy-makers](#) with a means to recognize individuals' constructive sustainability impact.

"Overall, users in the [pilot project](#) felt that it could help translate sustainability goals into actions. It motivated them to consistently make sustainable choices and created incentives to eat in a climate-friendly way," says Sood. The Food Futures research team is planning to run a second pilot experiment in the autumn.

  More information: Food Futures Fieldwork Report, 2022. atarca.eu/wp-content/uploads/Mooc-report-Aug-1.pdf

Provided by Aalto University

Citation: New technologies can help people make sustainable dietary decisions (2022, August 2)
retrieved 6 May 2024 from
https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-08-technologies-people-sustainable-dietary-decisions.html