# Focusing on nutrition reduces food waste more effectively than sustainability messaging



Recent research conducted by the University of Adelaide has unveiled a compelling paradox in food waste behaviour: individuals who prioritise nutrition tend to waste significantly less food than those who are primarily focused on sustainability. This insight challenges conventional wisdom, suggesting that efforts aimed at reducing food waste may be more effective when centred on promoting healthy eating rather than sustainability messaging alone.

In a survey involving over 1,000 Australians, researchers uncovered that nutrition-focused consumers exhibited far better planning and shopping habits, which naturally resulted in decreased food wastage. This was evident as participants who placed a high value on nutritious, micronutrient-rich food were more likely to plan their meals and create shopping lists before heading to the store. The findings indicated that each slight increase on the researchers' nutrition scale corresponded to a 17.6% reduction in food waste. Conversely, those who emphasised sustainability often encountered what the study describes as an "action-intention gap." While these consumers are typically more aware of ethical purchasing practices—such as local sourcing and reducing packaging—this awareness did not translate into concrete actions that effectively mitigate food waste.

The implications of this study are significant for policymakers and stakeholders invested in sustainability and food security. Writing in the journal Resources, Conservation and Recycling, the researchers advocate for a strategic shift in communication. They suggest that messaging should focus on the personal health benefits of proper nutrition while positioning sustainability as a supplementary advantage. “If sustainability efforts are integrated with strategies that promote healthy eating and enhance food management skills—such as meal planning, portion control, and proper storage—both individual health and environmental benefits can be maximised,” the researchers articulated.

This intersection of nutrition and sustainability reveals a complex landscape. A narrative review from various experts highlights that higher diet quality often correlates with increased food waste, underscoring the need for nutrition specialists to broaden their focus to include environmental impacts. Addressing these intertwined issues—food waste, nutrition, and sustainability—could yield improved public health outcomes and enhanced environmental stewardship.

Moreover, strategies that incorporate cooking education and meal planning have been linked to both healthier eating habits and reduced food waste. Researchers from the University of Illinois have noted that while a push to eat more can occasionally lead to overeating, better organisation—through shopping lists and planned meals—can help align waste reduction with enhanced dietary quality.

The broader context of food waste also reveals significant implications. It contributes anywhere from 5% to 10% of global greenhouse gas emissions, largely stemming from household waste. Alarming statistics show that one billion meals are discarded daily, resulting in an estimated $1 trillion in economic losses—a conservative figure at best. Effectively reducing food waste stands out as a key opportunity for individuals to make a positive climate impact, although studies reflect that substantial behavioural shifts are often contingent upon supportive policy frameworks.

Despite this, traditional policies often struggle to effect meaningful change, usually focusing heavily on sustainability rather than on the personal rewards of healthy eating. By adjusting their focus, policymakers might foster a more profound shift in consumer behaviour, one that upholds both personal health and ecological balance.

The research encourages households to meticulously plan ahead, resist impulse shopping, and make the most of their existing supplies. Through practical measures that integrate nutritional guidance with sustainability education, consumers can adopt behaviours that not only address personal wellbeing but also contribute to broader environmental goals. This dual approach ultimately advocates for a mindset where health takes precedence, while the positive effects on sustainability are regarded as an encouraging bonus.

As this perspective gains traction, it has the potential to reshape how communities engage with both food consumption and waste management, fostering a future that is not only nutritionally sound but also environmentally responsible.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4
2. Paragraph 5
3. Paragraph 6
4. Paragraph 7
5. Paragraph 8
6. Paragraph 9
7. Paragraph 10

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/food-waste-reduction-nutrition-health-benefits-sustainability/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32585005/> - This narrative review examines the unexpected relationships between food waste, nutrition, and environmental sustainability. It highlights that higher diet quality is associated with greater food waste, leading to significant losses of resources and greenhouse gas emissions. The review emphasizes the need for nutrition professionals to expand their focus to include food waste and environmental sustainability, suggesting that addressing these interconnected issues can improve public health and environmental outcomes.
3. <https://aces.illinois.edu/news/how-we-can-reduce-food-waste-and-promote-healthy-eating> - Researchers from the University of Illinois discuss strategies to reduce food waste while promoting healthy eating. They highlight that while reducing food waste by eating more can inadvertently lead to overeating, better meal planning and using shopping lists can help achieve both waste reduction and improved nutrition. The researchers also suggest that cooking education can enhance diet quality and repurpose leftovers, contributing to waste reduction.
4. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34070070/> - This scoping review explores the intrinsic link between food waste and nutrition in the context of public health. It identifies four main concepts: the relationship between food waste and diet quality, food waste reduction interventions, food banks and diet quality, and food waste messaging in nutrition guidelines. The review suggests that addressing food waste can improve nutritional outcomes and that food redistribution systems should focus on providing access to sustainably sourced, nutrient-dense foods.
5. <https://www.vaia.com/en-us/explanations/nutrition-and-food-science/food-sustainability-agriculture/food-waste-management/> - This article discusses the impact of food waste on nutrition and the importance of food waste management in sustainable nutrition. It highlights that wasted food leads to the loss of vital nutrients and wastes resources like water and energy. The article emphasizes that effective food waste management can improve food security, preserve resources, and promote environmental sustainability, leading to more balanced diets and better health outcomes.
6. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10163564/> - This study reviews food waste production at universities worldwide and identifies factors influencing waste, such as gender, age, season, and consumer behavior. It also examines strategies to prevent food waste, including composting, recycling, and education. The study suggests that universities can reduce food waste by implementing planning and awareness programs, improving food preparation and storage, and reusing waste directly, leading to reductions of 13 to 50% in food waste.
7. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9794859/> - This study evaluates the relationship between adherence to dietary recommendations and food waste behaviors in Italian families. It finds that a shift toward a healthy and sustainable diet can lead to increased food waste, as healthy diets often include perishable items like fruits and vegetables. The study suggests that promoting healthy eating habits can be linked to a sustainable lifestyle and that nutrition education can help prevent food waste at the household level.