

Affordable Diets

Addressing society's most complex issues requires a systems-based approach that maximizes partnerships and innovation. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer a framework for tackling these challenges by fostering cross-sector collaboration and guiding policy decisions. The dairy sector is helping catalyze progress towards achieving the SDGs, improving quality of life, reducing global disparities, and ensuring a sustainable future for all.

2 ZERO HUNGER



The Situation

- Leading public health organizations, such as the World Health Organization, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and UNICEF estimate 2.8 billion people (35.4% of the population) are unable to afford a healthy diet.¹
- Current recommendations for sustainable eating are unattainable to a large segment of the global population. For example, on average, the 2019 EAT-Lancet Planetary Health Diet is 60% more costly than alternative regional diets that provide nutrient adequacy.^{2,3}
- Removing animal source foods (ASF) from the diet means having to spend more money on food to meet basic nutritional needs.⁴ With inflationary concerns around food escalating in recent years, it has become clear that global diet recommendations could become an economic burden to consumers both in emerging economies and developed countries, creating ripples for food insecurity and malnutrition.

The Path Forward

While no single solution can address the complexities of global food affordability and nutritional adequacy, promoting culturally appropriate and economically viable diets can drive significant progress. The inclusion of ASF in the diet, such as dairy, is the most efficient and effective way to provide adequate nutrition for the lowest cost.⁵ By ensuring access and availability of nutrient-dense foods we can support healthy, sustainable, and affordable diets that benefit both individual health, and broader global development goals.



How Dairy Can Help

- **Improves cost efficiency:** Dairy accounts for a significant portion of nutrient requirements at a lower cost, including more than one quarter of daily protein requirements and more than half of daily calcium requirements. Meeting daily nutrition needs with a plants-only diet would cost two times as much as one that included ASF.^{5,6}
- **Provides high-quality nutrient density:** Dairy products are rich in essential nutrients, including several that many people fall short on, including calcium and high-quality protein. These nutrients are more bioavailable from animal source foods, meaning the body can absorb and utilize them more efficiently.⁶
- **Enhances farmer resiliency:** The dairy sector creates jobs on farms and in milk production facilities. Dairy farmers receive a steady income compared to seasonal crop farming, which improves farmers' economic resiliency and security. Improving dairy production also results in increased agricultural value and access to nutritious foods, plus additional tax revenue for governments to provide the public goods and services that will be necessary to achieve the SDGs.^{7,8,9}



Partnering with Dairy

- **Promote cooperative efforts to support inclusion of nutrient-rich dairy in healthy sustainable diets:** Animal sourced foods (ASF), such as dairy are vital for combatting malnutrition by providing affordable and accessible essential nutrients. Consumption should be considered within the local nutritional needs and cultural foodways, while facilitating practices that grow local economies and mitigate environmental impacts to ensure sustainable production.³
- **Invest in farmers and their communities:** Producing enough milk and preventing it from spoiling is essential to supporting healthier and more climate-resilient communities. Initiatives like reducing on-farm emissions intensity, training in safe milk storage handling, and access to carefully targeted financial assistance for small-scale farmers have proven to amplify both productivity and income, helping families achieve financial stability while improving food security and nutrition status.^{8,10}
- **Enhance value chains and market access:** Access to nutrition improves when dairy production increases. While solutions are highly context-specific, dairy cooperative models and new agricultural technologies have been successful in improving the local dairy sector and making dairy more affordable for consumers, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.^{8,10,11}

Scan for references
and more information



Impact Story

Diet Affordability: A Key Dimension in the Assessment of Sustainable Food Systems

OVERVIEW

A 2024 modeling study aimed to determine the respective roles of ASF and plant-sourced foods in developing a least-cost nutritionally adequate diet.

PARTNERS

Riddet Institute, Massey University

KEY FINDINGS⁸

Least-cost nutritionally adequate diets were found to include ASF, such as milk, eggs, fish, and seafood to meet the energy and nutrient requirements of healthy adults at the lowest retail cost:

- In the U.S. and New Zealand, a plants-only least-cost nutritionally adequate diet would be 2-11x more expensive than one containing ASF
- Preliminary modeling studies in Indonesia indicate ASF are required for the least-cost nutritionally adequate diet
- Similar modeling studies are being conducted in the Philippines, Kenya, and Tanzania