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Produce choices come under the spotlight



Eating more fruit and veg is good for health and the environment, but which products bring the greatest benefits?

The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine has carried out a study into the relationship between nutrition, the environment and health, which seeks to identify dietary changes that would be positive for human health and the planet.

The study sets out four pathways encouraging people to eat more fruit and vegetables and assesses each one's impact on health and the environment.

These are: increasing the quantity of the same fruit and vegetables currently consumed; adding an extra by two portions of vegetables a day; adding an extra two portions of home-grown fruit and vegetables, and adding an extra two portions of home-grown vegetables.

Presenting the findings at this week's FPJLive, Rosie Green, associate professor in sustainability, nutrition and health, said: "With fewer than 30 per cent

of British consumers currently getting their five-a-day, we all know that we need to increase consumption, but what should people be encouraged to eat more of?

"People's tastes are changing – they are moving more towards fruit and away from vegetables, and also eating more tropical fruits and less home-grown fruit. This is not good for climate change."

Green pointed out that around one-third of all the fruit and vegetables consumed in the UK now come from countries vulnerable to climate change and half comes from countries where water scarcity is an issue.

The study showed that all four pathways would lead to people living by an average of 7-8 months longer. In each case there would also be a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and water usage. But the diets would also be more expensive.

Moreover, it calculates that increasing only vegetable intake is the least expensive option and would lead to the biggest reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

"All the pathways would result in people living longer and reduce carbon emissions, but are all more expensive, suggesting that some sort of policy change to allow people to buy more fresh produce more cheaply would help," Green said.

While eating more UK-grown fruit and vegetables would yield slightly less benefit in terms of carbon footprint it would be more beneficial in terms of water savings, the study found.

The types of products consumed would also change markedly. Currently, the most widely consumed products are baked beans, onions, carrots, tomatoes, peas, bananas, apples, pears and citrus. But encouraging people to eat more UK-grown produce, would lead to a greater

consumption of products like cabbage, lettuce, courgettes, asparagus, leeks, strawberries and apples.

“What’s clear is that each and every one of these five-a-day pathways would help the UK to meet carbon

emission targets, while also contributing to NHS life expectancy targets,” Green said.

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