

Food Fact Sheet

The story of food and our environment

We all need to eat food - food and water keep us alive. But many of us are turning to food to satisfy more than just our hunger: we eat when we are bored, lonely, depressed or miserable. We've had a taste of the good stuff and we want more! Problem is, the good tasting stuff is the bad stuff (as usual): bad for our health and bad for our planet!

Why is the good-tasting stuff bad for the planet?

Well sadly, food that tastes good has often been heavily processed, so much so that sometimes you can't even tell what's in the food without looking at the label. Why are the makers trying to confuse us? Do they have something to hide?



On top of that, **most processed food comes in fancy, attractive and non-biodegradable wrapping.** Unable to break down, this stuff just ends up in landfill, contributing to the already enormous pollution problem.

It's not just the foods that are bad for us that have a negative environmental impact: **even the healthy stuff can be a problem.** For example, we've become so accustomed to having the foods we want when we want them that we're completely out of wack with what nature's seasons. Strawberries in winter, pumpkins in summer: it's all topsy-turvy. The problem is that to have all this food when we want it we often have to ship it long distances, costing us energy and emissions.

But that's not all. **Food also takes vast amounts of water to grow and produce.** Check out this table – we think you will be surprised. We certainly were! You'll never think about that cup of coffee in the same way ever again!

An apple = 70 litres	A glass of beer = 75 litres
A glass of wine = 120 litres	Bag of chips = 185 litres
Slice of bread = 40 litres	Cup of tea = 35 litres
Cup of coffee = 140 litres	A potato = 25 litres
An egg = 135 litres	Glass of milk = 200 litres
Hamburger = 2400 litres	Cotton t-shirt = 2000 litres
Leather shoes = 8000 litres	One kg of beef = 16000 litres

Food waste also produces large amounts of methane, contributing to climate change. And yes, people all over the world are still going hungry, even while in many parts of the world the obesity epidemic is killing more of us earlier in life. For the first time in human history our life expectancy is getting lower. We are loving food too much!

For more information on how you can help our environment, or to make some suggestions of your own, please go to www.coolaustralia.org



coolaustralia.org

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Did you know?

* **Food waste includes uneaten portions of meals** and trimmings from food preparation activities in kitchens, restaurants and cafeterias. Food waste is the third-largest component of generated waste by weight. However, because of its low composting rate, food waste is the largest component of discarded waste by weight. (1)

* It has been estimated that **Australians discard up to 20% of the food they purchase**, the equivalent of buying five bags of groceries and throwing one away. (2)



* **Australian households are throwing out \$5.2 billion worth of food each year**, which exceeds the amount they spend on digital equipment such as flat screen TVs. (3)

* **Wasting food also wastes the water that went into its production.** ABS data shows that in 2004-05 the agriculture industry accounted for 65% of total water consumption in Australia, using 12 gigalitres or 12 thousand million litres of water. Further, the fertilisers and pesticides used in the production of food pollute land, air and water runoffs. (4)

* **A cow can drink up to 250 litres of water a day** and produce only 35 - 40 litres of milk. (5)

* The decomposition of organic matter such as **food waste in landfill is a major contributor to the generation of the highly damaging greenhouse gas methane**, a gas 21 times more potent than CO₂ in its impacts on climate change. Food waste related CO₂ equivalent greenhouse emissions in Australia are 13.5 million tonnes a year. (6)

* A **recent German study** found that a 240ml cup of yoghurt in a supermarket shelf in Berlin entails over 9,000km of transportation (Germans eat three billion cups a year). (7)

* In the United States, the **food for a typical meal has travelled nearly 2,100km**, but if that meal contains off-season fruits or vegetables the total distance is many times higher. (8)

* **Over 30% of the greenhouse emissions produced in Australia** can be attributed to animal industries. Animal industries account for 65% of human-related nitrous oxide, 37% of all human induced methane, a substance 23 times as warming as CO₂. (9)

* **Almost 50% of Australia is grazed by animals** that are raised for human consumption. (10)

* **Vegetarians** have sixfold lower greenhouse gas emissions than carnivores. And while it costs \$508 a week to feed four adults on a traditional meat diet, a vegetarian diet costs \$394. (11)



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What can you do?

* **First things first: reduce animal products.** Don't worry! We're not asking you to give up your favourite foods: meat and dairy can be part of a healthy, sustainable diet, but just don't overdo it.

* **Wherever you can choose organic.** Organic farming uses no synthetic pesticides or fertilisers and focuses on the health of the soil, which, you will probably have already guessed, will also be better for you.

* **Bring the paddock closer to your plate.** We don't mean eating in a paddock (although that could be nice - mind the farting cows!) but locally produced food is the best choice for our environment. Australian food has travelled a shorter distance and buying Australian supports our farmers and growers. Everyone wins.

* **Choose unprocessed or unrefined foods.** All food carries some 'embodied' energy and water. This refers to the amount of energy and water that goes into producing the food. Unsurprisingly, the more processed or refined a product is, the more embodied energy it contains. If it's wrapped in plastic, paper or canned chances are it has been processed. Fresh is always best!

* **Eat food that is in season.** If you are eating grapes in winter they have come to you on a jet plane.

* **Stick with local produce.** It hasn't travelled around the world to get to you.

* **Save energy by finding someone to cook for.** Cooking for two (or more if you're game) uses the same energy as cooking for one. No-one else keen to eat your food? Cook as many portions as you can keep in the fridge for later. Microwaves do less harm than burning gas for only one portion.

* **Eat what you buy:** don't waste it, just eat it!

* **Feed your scraps to your chooks,** dogs or guinea pigs, or compost scraps, leaves, grass clippings and soft stemmed plants. If you don't have a compost bin yet, you can dig fruit and veggie scraps directly into the garden. If you want a compost bin head to your local hardware or council.

* **Worm farms** can convert your food, vegetable scraps, crushed eggshells, tea bags, coffee grounds, vacuum cleaner dust, hair etc., into liquid fertiliser for your plants. Worm farms can be purchased from Council.

Visit www.coolaustralia.org for more tips on eco-friendly eating.



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