



The Importance of Sustainable Food Production



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 **Quick read**

Introduction

Sustainable food production involves the production of safe and nutritious food in a viable industry, protecting natural resources while benefitting local communities. Sustainable methods of producing food are essential in feeding growing global populations while ensuring the long-term viability of food production, through the protection of vital natural resources such as land and water, and the prevention of climate change.

Conventional Agriculture

As the world's population rapidly increased over the last century, so has the demand for food. As this demand for food has grown, so too has the pressure on limited natural resources such as fertile soils and fresh water. As a result, conventional methods of agriculture have directly contributed to climate change, water scarcity, soil degradation and biodiversity loss as food production rushes to keep up with inflating demand.

Some of the negative impacts conventional agriculture has had include:

- An estimated 25% of global greenhouse gas emissions directly attributable to agriculture
- Growing crops and keeping of livestock account for 70% of the Earth's freshwater resources. Together with forestry, they take up 60% of the Earth's land surface
- Deforestation across the globe has not only caused significant habitat and biodiversity loss, but also released vast quantities of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere while reducing the number of trees available to sequester the same carbon
- The constant tilling of land and growing of the same crops year on year leads to land degradation
- Overuse of chemicals leads to pollution of soils, land and waterways

- Sustainable agriculture is the key to improving issues such as food security and malnourishment, while combatting climate change and biodiversity loss
- The world is shifting away from conventional to sustainable agriculture to ensure a healthier, more productive planet as global populations grow and climate change continues to threaten
- Some conventional agriculture practices are no longer sustainable. New techniques in sustainable practice include reducing pesticides, redesign of supply chains, and the use of technology for more output and efficiency in garnering that output
- Advantages to sustainable agriculture will accrue to local economies and farmers while sustaining fertile soils, biodiversity and freshwater resources

Why We Need Sustainable Agriculture

Given that the Earth's population is set to reach over 9 billion by 2050, it is of paramount importance that the resources needed to feed humanity are protected. Sustainable agriculture must also involve creating viable livelihoods for farmers and producing nutrient-dense foods to afford diversified diets to consumers that supports good health. Many practices driving modern agriculture are completely unsustainable. For example, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has estimated that 7 million hectares of forestry are lost globally each year- replaced by 6 million hectares of agricultural land. This unsustainable practice releases huge amounts of carbon dioxide, contributes to the spread of desertification and degradation of soil, and destroys biological diversity in the form of plants and animals. The discontinuation of such habits is necessary to ensure food security for future generations.



Sustainable Food Examples

Making food supply chains more sustainable incorporates a range of practices that can be implemented from farm to fork. Some examples of these includes:

- Reducing pesticide and fertiliser use
- Reducing post-harvest losses
- The use of minimum tillage and cover cropping techniques
- Preserving soil quality and managing water resources
- Sourcing energy from renewable sources
- Redesigning distribution channels to reduce the distance between farm and fork
- Adopting technologies that increase output and improve efficiency
- Rejecting the cosmetic standards of food and reducing food waste

Conclusion

The shift from conventional to sustainable agriculture is increasingly necessary. Sustainable agriculture is the key to improving issues such as food security and malnourishment, while ensuring climate change and biodiversity loss do not materialise into environmental disaster. Sustainable means of production benefit economies as well as the planet and can help to ensure the long-term prosperity of the world as we know it.

The Benefits of Sustainable Food Production

Sustainable food production seeks to benefit stakeholders at all levels of the food chain—producers, farm communities, processors, retailers and consumers. Sustainable food chains mean:

- Better incomes and livelihoods for farmers
- Stimulated local economies
- Mitigating the effects of climate change to ensure food can still be grown worldwide
- Sustaining fertile soils and successful management of freshwater resources
- Maintenance of vital biodiversity services e.g. pollinators
- Increasing food availability and quality and subsequently reducing the number of people who are food insecure



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