

US dietary guidelines shouldn't ignore climate change

January 08, 2019 11:30 AM Keith Brannon

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The position paper, written by Tulane nutrition researcher Diego Rose, calls for adding more specific sustainability advice to dietary guidelines such as information about how adding more plant-based foods and eating less meat is healthier and better for the environment. Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano.

Federal guidelines about how to eat a balanced diet should also include information about how food choices affect the planet and long-term sustainability of the food system, according to a [new policy statement](#) from the [Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior](#) co-written by a Tulane University researcher.

The leading group of nutrition educators, researchers and policymakers cited the significant impact that dietary choices and agriculture have in contributing to climate change as one of several reasons that the government must do more to educate consumers about the impact of diet on a larger scale beyond personal health.

“The [position paper](#) was motivated by the severity of current environmental problems, including global climate change,” said lead author [Diego Rose](#), professor of nutrition and food security at Tulane University’s School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine. “Based on the best science we have today, it is clear that current environmental problems—including global climate change, biodiversity loss, land degradation, water shortages, and water pollution—demand urgent attention, threaten long-term food security, and are in part caused by our current food choices and agricultural practices.”

The position paper, which was published in the [Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior](#), calls for adding more specific sustainability advice to dietary guidelines such as information about how adding more plant-based foods and eating less meat than the typical American diet is healthier and better for the environment.

“People want to know what to eat today, so it is incumbent on those of us who are knowledgeable about nutritional science and education techniques to provide the best advice, based on the available evidence to date,” Rose said. “Environmental impacts related to diet can be lessened by choosing fewer overconsumed animal products —particularly beef and other red meat— including more plant-based foods and reducing excess calorie consumption and wasted food.”

Discussion of sustainability within governmental dietary guidance is common in many countries and is consistent with previous U.S. guidelines. Rose believes that many consumers who are concerned about the environment would welcome sound advice about sustainability from credentialed nutritionists.

An audio podcast featuring an interview with Rose about the new policy statement is available online at www.jneb.org/content/podcast.