



WRI Sustainable Catering & Events Policy (U.S. Version, Feb. 2017)

WRI strives to “walk the talk,” integrating sustainability principles into our own operations. (WRI.org)

This policy is designed to help WRI adopt internal measures to shifting towards a plant-based diet and reducing food and material waste during events and meetings. For more information about WRI food research and rationale for the policy, see [Rationale for Sourcing Plant-Based Foods](#) (page 5).

Application of Policy

All WRI U.S. Office food and catering orders using WRI funds, and whenever possible all WRI funded events and meetings that occur outside of WRI U.S. Office, should follow the policy.¹

Plant-Based Food

The policy requires that only vegetarian and vegan food be ordered for meetings and events that use WRI funds.

The latest version of the **Vetted Vendor List** ([link](#)) documents the performance of Washington, DC-area vendors in sustainability issues, including plant-based food variety, food ingredients, and sustainable operations. The list also includes other factors such as relative cost and service to facilitate the ordering process.

For small orders (<\$200):

- Order vegetarian and vegan food from any vendor on the **Vetted Vendor List** ([link](#)),
- OR order vegetarian and vegan food from any vendor of your choice and attempt to verify the other food ingredient criteria from the food checklist, i.e. organic, local, fair trade ingredients, or sustainably-certified ingredients.² Please submit the vendor name to the **food policy team** ([link](#)) for future vetting.

¹ The policy does not apply to events hosted by staff utilizing staff money (e.g., going away parties, birthday lunches) or food purchased by staff during business travel (e.g., per diems).

² The environmental tradeoffs of organic vs. non-organic may vary due to a number of different variables including, but not limited to, reduced energy use and GHG emissions by not utilizing synthetic nitrogen fertilizer; reduced pollution from pesticides, insecticides and herbicides; and improved carbon sequestration, water storage capacity and reduced soil erosion—but increased land use (and related GHG emissions from land-use change) due to lower organic yields. Tuomisto et al. (2012), for instance, found that in Europe, organic farming systems tended to have lower energy use but higher land use per unit of crop product than conventional, higher-intensity farming systems. The environmental benefits of locally-sourced food are often overstated (given that the bulk of environmental impacts often happen before the farm-gate and that impacts from transportation are often only a minority) (Arcand et al. [2012], Foster et al. [2006]), but purchasing local can have environmental benefits as well as social benefits (supporting local farmers).

For large orders (>\$200):

- Order vegetarian and vegan food from **Tier 1** of the **Vetted Vendor List** ([link](#)),
- OR order vegetarian and vegan food from an alternate vendor using by using the **Vendor Scorecard** ([link](#)) to demonstrate the vendor addresses holistic sustainability in both food ingredients as well as operations. Submit the completed **Vendor Scorecard** to the **food policy team** ([link](#)).

The goal is to develop positive experiences and associations with plant-based food selections and develop sustainable habits for events. If staff have any feedback on vendors from the **Vetted Vendor List** ([link](#)), please share them with the **food policy team** ([link](#)) so the list can continue to support the goal of the policy.

Please factor in these other considerations when selecting food:

- Limit the consumption of large portions of dairy products, such as cheese platters, as dairy's environmental impacts are similar to those of most meats.
- When purchasing or ordering alcoholic beverages, prioritize the purchase of local wine and beer options.
- For imported products like coffee or tea, place preference on fair-trade and/or organic.
- Consider the health of your colleagues and guests by ordering well-balanced meals and noting any dietary restrictions.³

At times, there may be cultural or otherwise sensitive situations at events and meetings. If it is necessary to serve meat at such an event, seafood, poultry, or pork should be served. Beef, lamb, and goat should always be avoided due to their [high resource use and environmental impacts](#). This is considered an exception to the policy and should not become the norm.

- For seafood, purchase *Best Choices* or the *Good Alternatives* from the [Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch](#). Do not order seafood found on the *Avoid* list⁴ or seafood that does not provide any sourcing information.

Food Waste

According to WRI research ([Food Loss & Waste Protocol](#)), about 24 percent of all calories currently produced for human consumption are lost or wasted. To minimize food waste—a significant problem globally and especially in the United States⁵—leftovers should be offered to participants and/or WRI staff.

³ A well-balanced meal should include similarly-sized portions of protein, whole grains, fruits, and vegetables. Some [healthy and low-impact protein options](#) include beans (black beans, navy beans, garbanzos, and lentils), nuts (almonds, walnuts, pistachios, and pecans), soy products (tofu, soy milk, tempeh, and some veggie burgers) and protein-packed grains like quinoa. Note also that grains (e.g., bread) contain a significant amount of protein.

⁴ The Monterey Bay Aquarium rates the wild-caught or farm (aquaculture) practices and management and its impacts on the individual fish species and other marine life in order to provide a 3-tiered recommendation list of seafood species.

⁵ The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) estimates that a third, by weight, of all food produced in the world was lost or wasted in 2009. This level of inefficiency has significant economic, social, and environmental impacts. For example, it results in approximately US\$940 billion per year in economic losses, according to FAO estimates. It exacerbates food insecurity. And the amount of food lost or wasted translates into about a quarter of all water used by agriculture, requires cropland equivalent to an area the size of China, and is responsible for an estimated 8 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions (CGF et al. [2016]). In North America, an estimated 42 percent of all available food calories

- Be sure to order the right amount of food by working with the WRI Events Manager.
- Be sure to offer leftovers to event and meeting participants before the end of the event.
- Bring leftovers to the café or other common staff space for other staff; leave a note or email when needed.
- Clean up at the end of the day – sorting food waste into the landfill bin (composting will be piloted for WRI U.S. office soon) and rinse recyclables of food before throwing into the recycling bin.

Other Material Waste

Tableware and Packaging

- Ask caterers and vendors to minimize packing materials. If they offer low or no-cost reusable serving materials, work with the vendor and WRI Events Manager to arrange to store materials until the vendor can pick them up.
- Use reusable cups, mugs, plates, and utensils to minimize waste.⁶
- Request recyclable and/or biodegradable⁷ platters, dishes, and utensils when reusable options are not possible.⁸

Print Materials

- Avoid printing meeting documents in bulk and consider supplying participants with electronic documents before or after the event or meeting. When hard copies are necessary, please print double-sided and in black and white as much as possible.
- Engage with external speakers and guests prior to the event to minimize or eliminate handouts.

Recycling and Landfill Bins

- Ensure that recycling and landfill bins are available in the event or meeting space and that [Recycling Signage](#) (link) is appropriately displayed.

Communicating and Shifting Behavior

The WRI plant-based food policy is an opportunity to communicate WRI food research and how the organization “walks the talk.” Be sure to plan communications materials to help share information on the impact of food choices on the environment and to provide staff and visitors positive perceptions of plant-based foods. Some ideas for communication include, but are not limited to:

- Request that caterers and vendors provide information about the ingredients.
- Share or display the “Protein Scorecard” or shifting diets research from www.wri.org/shiftingdiets.

were lost or wasted in 2009, with the majority of the waste occurring at the consumption stage (in the home or business of the consumer, including restaurants and caterers) (Lipinski et al. [2013]).

⁶ Using the dishwashers can save water and improve the cleanliness of the tableware. Dishwashers are run each afternoon by the cleaning staff and we rely on WRI staff courtesy for loading and unloading of dishware. Please be considerate of your fellow staff and guests.

⁷ The best choice will depend on whether a recycling or composting program is in place at a given location. Biodegradable is the better choice when a composting program is offered. We currently do not have composting at the DC office but will be piloting it soon.

⁸ WRI’s recycling vendor does not accept plastic utensils, they need to be placed in Landfill or collected and arranged for specialty recycling. Please rinse recyclables before putting in the Recycling bin.

- Display the **food policy signage** ([link](#)) at events.
- Use food policy talking points with visitors when possible.
- For events with visitors that may not be aware of or may be concerned about the food policy, consider *not* informing visitors that the food is vegetarian, vegan, or plant-based until after visitors have finished and enjoyed their meals.⁹

If you would like assistance with the communications effort, please contact the **food policy team** ([link](#)). Contact **WRI Events Manager** ([link](#)) to borrow general WRI and WRI food policy signage for your event or meeting.

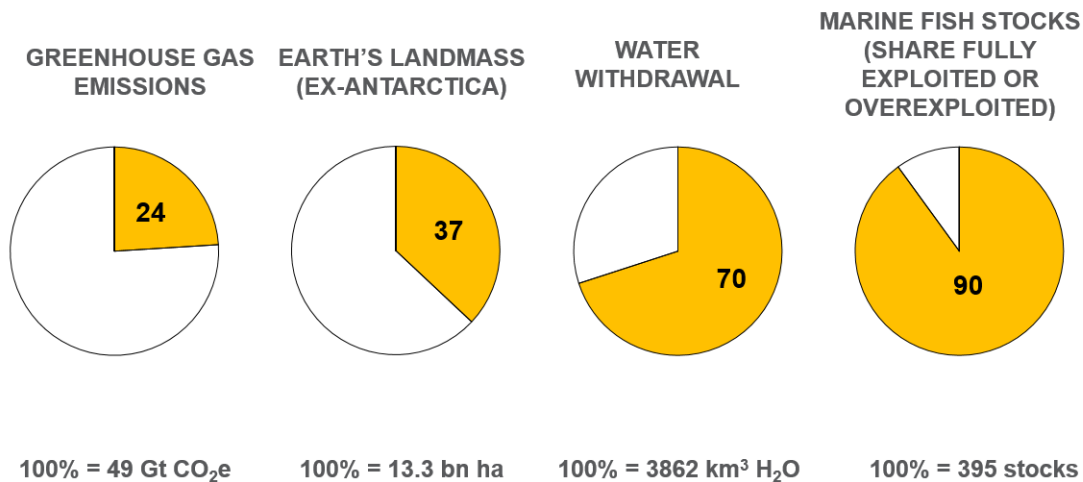
⁹ Studies have shown that foods labeled as "healthy" (which plant-based foods are often assumed to be) can lead a consumer to perceive them as less tasty and less filling, and lead the consumer to report still feeling hungry or unsatisfied at the end of the meal, relative to consumers who ate foods without any health messaging (Raghunathan, Naylor, and Hoyer, 2006; Suher, Raghunathan, and Hoyer, 2016).

Rationale for sourcing plant-based foods


WRI recognizes the diversity of tastes and cultures represented by its staff, and also acknowledges that food choices can greatly influence the environment. WRI’s paper, *Shifting Diets for a Sustainable Food Future*,¹⁰ informs our approach to selecting foods and meals at our events.

Agricultural production has significant impacts on Earth’s systems through greenhouse gas emissions, demand for land and impacts on natural ecosystems (e.g., tropical forests, marine ecosystems), use of freshwater resources, and the impact on water quality, among others (see Figure 1). Furthermore, demand for food is projected to increase by 70 percent between 2006 and 2050.

Figure 1: Agriculture’s share of global impacts, percent (~2010)



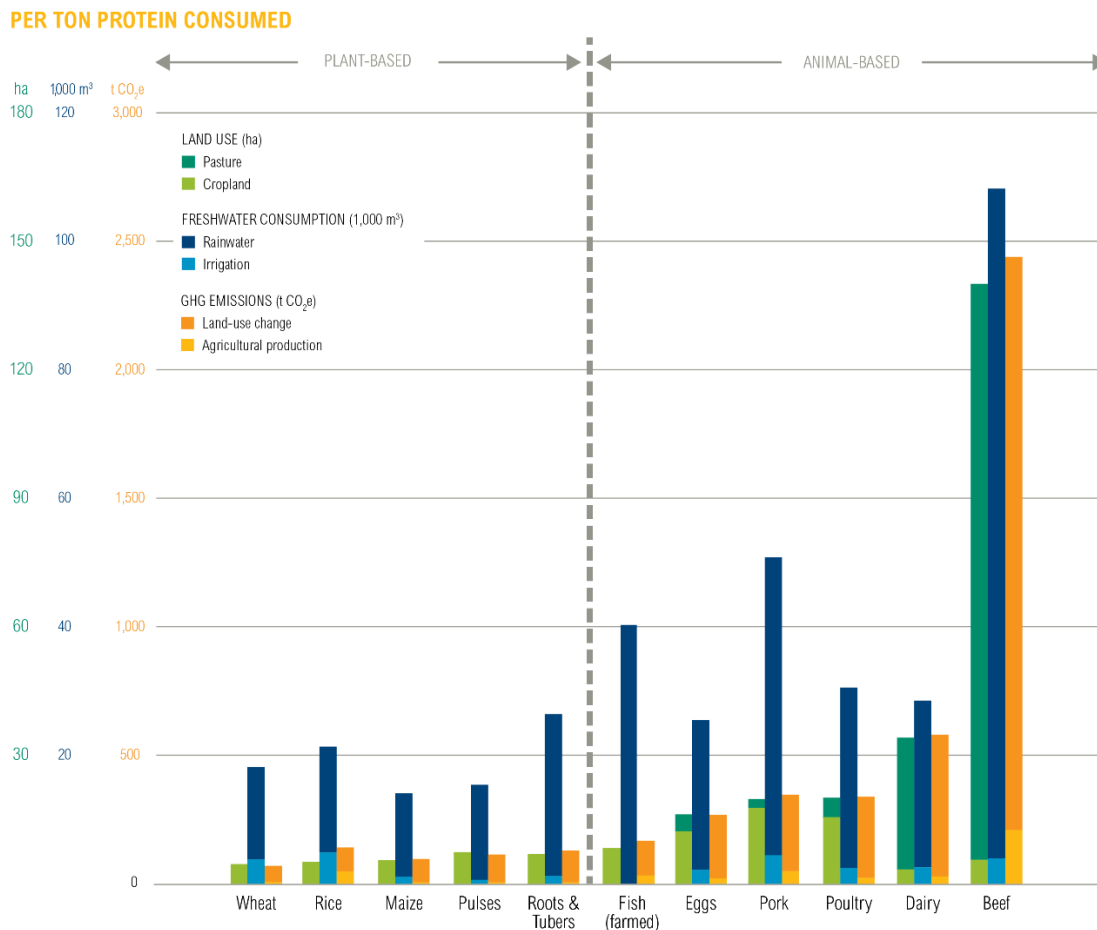
Source: WRI analysis based on IEA (2012); EIA (2012); EPA (2012); Houghton (2008); FAO (2011); FAO (2012a); Foley et al. (2005); FAO (2014).

 WORLD RESOURCES INSTITUTE

One of the most concerning impacts is the contribution of livestock to global land use and greenhouse gas emissions—and particularly the contribution of beef and other ruminants (lamb and goat). Livestock production accounted for more than three-quarters of global agricultural land use and around two-thirds of agriculture’s production-related greenhouse gas emissions in 2009, while only contributing 37 percent of total protein consumed by people in that year. The production of beef and other ruminants contributed nearly half of agriculture’s production-related emissions. The outsized impact of animal-based foods on the environment is due to the fact that they are generally more resource-intensive to produce than plant-based foods (Figure 2). And demand for meat and dairy is projected to grow even faster than overall food demand—80 percent between 2006 and 2050—while beef demand will nearly double during that period.

¹⁰ The statistics in this section are taken from Ranganathan et al. (2016).

Figure 2: Animal-Based Foods Are More Resource-Intensive than Plant-Based Foods



wri.org/shiftingdiets

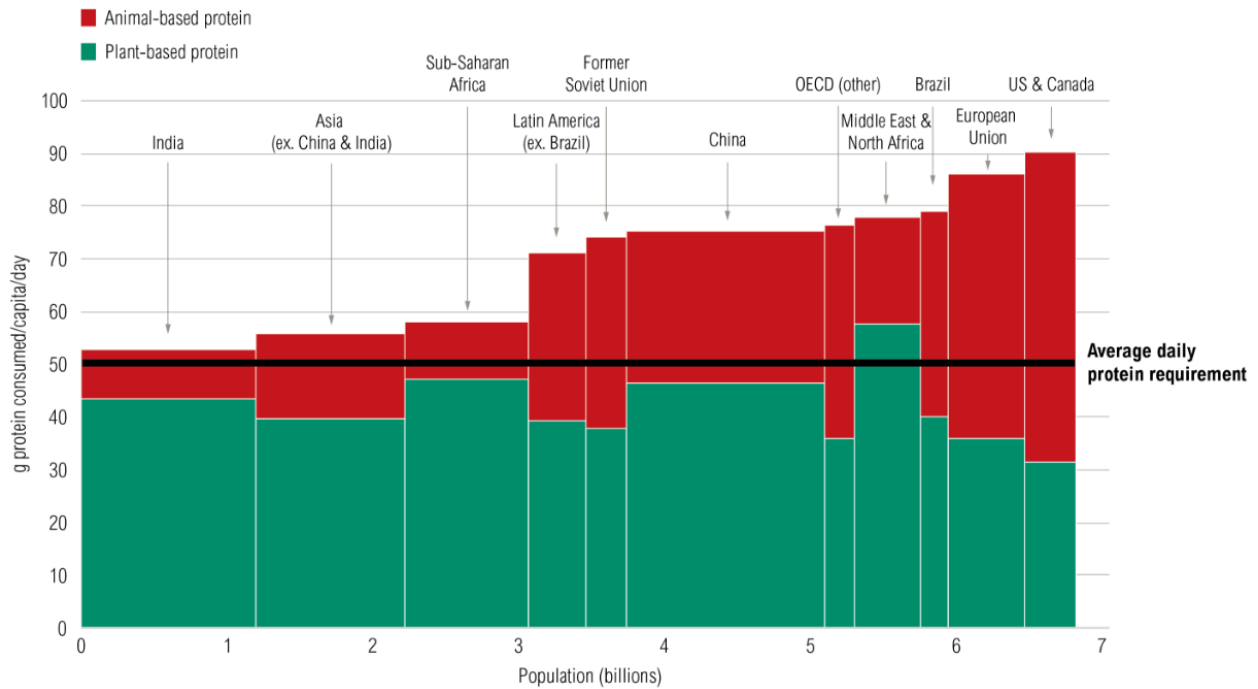
WORLD RESOURCES INSTITUTE

Consumption of meat and dairy is highest in developed countries like the United States, where the average person consumes 200 pounds of meat annually and more than 50 grams of animal-based protein every day (Figure 3). For emerging economies like China, per-capita consumption has been increasing rapidly in recent decades, and future increases are expected across the developing world. Although the benefits of protein consumption are well known, the extent of protein *overconsumption*, especially among wealthier populations, is much less commonly appreciated. For example, the average American man consumes nearly 100 grams of protein per day, nearly twice what he needs, and the majority of it comes from animal-based foods.

Therefore, for populations consuming more protein than they need, curbing meat and dairy consumption and increasing the share of plant-based foods as part of a balanced diet is an effective method of reducing dietary environmental impacts (Figure 4). Indeed, WRI and other researchers have found that reducing consumption of animal-based foods—especially beef, sheep, and goat—is an essential ingredient in limiting global warming to below 2 degrees Celsius

and eliminating agricultural land-use change.¹¹ Other researchers have shown that shifts from animal- toward plant-based foods can also improve people’s health.¹²

Figure 3: People Are Eating More Protein than They Need – Especially in Wealthy Regions



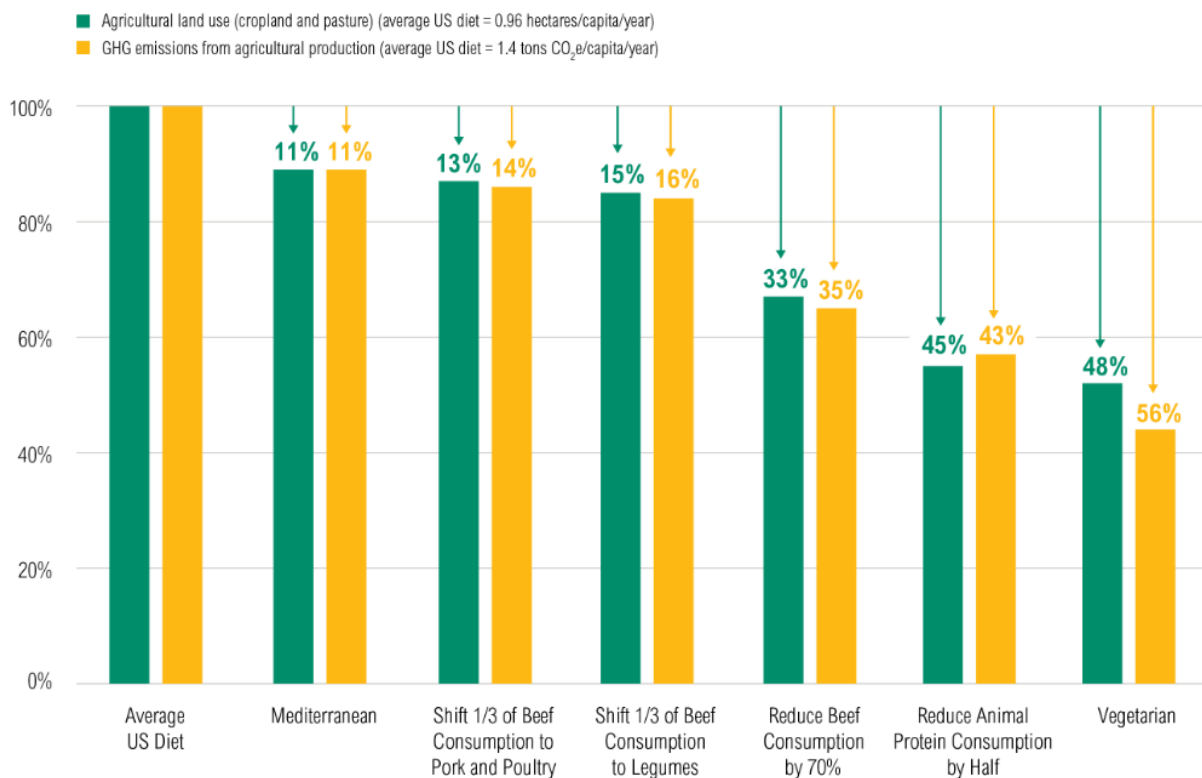
wri.org/shiftingdiets

 WORLD RESOURCES INSTITUTE

¹¹ Hedenus et al. (2014), Searchinger et al. (forthcoming).

¹² See, for example, Springmann et al. (2016).

Figure 4: Shifting High Consumers' Diets Can Greatly Reduce Per Person Land Use and GHG Emissions



wri.org/shiftingdiets



We recognize that the global agricultural system is extremely varied and complex. It can be difficult to say with certainty that choosing one specific food type over another is the “right choice” when all environmental and social aspects are considered. The specific location of the land and the management practices employed by the farmer have significant impacts on the environmental and social footprint of a given food. However, reducing consumption of animal-based foods (especially beef, lamb, and goat) at WRI events is likely to generate environmental, resource-use, and other benefits, regardless of the production systems employed. It can also lower catering costs, since plant-based meal options are often cheaper (Figure 5). Although the catering policy may be imperfect because of these uncertainties, it reflects our best effort to “walk the talk” by showcasing the change we want to see in the external world. Limiting the amount of meat and dairy we consume at WRI events is an important action to protect Earth’s environment and its capacity to provide for the needs and aspirations of current and future generations.

Figure 5: Protein Scorecard

	FOOD	IMPACT (GHG emissions per gram of protein)	COST (Retail price per gram of protein)
LOW	Wheat		\$
	Corn		\$
	Beans, chickpeas, lentils		\$
	Rice		\$
	Fish		\$\$\$
	Soy		\$
	Nuts		\$\$\$
	Eggs		\$\$
MEDIUM	Poultry		\$\$
	Pork		\$\$
	Dairy (milk, cheese)		\$\$
HIGH	Beef		\$\$\$
	Lamb & goat		\$\$\$

Lighter shade shows emissions from agricultural production, darker shade shows emissions from land-use change.

Sources: GlobAgri-WRR model developed by CIRAD, Princeton University, INRA, and WRI (GHG data); USDA and BLS (2016) (US retail price data).

www.wri.org/proteinscorecard



WORLD RESOURCES INSTITUTE

Authors & Acknowledgements:

Authored by the Sustainability Champions food policy team, including Bekah Holloway (Special Assistant, Managing Director's Office), Emily Vail (Events Manager, Communications), Richard Waite (Associate, Food Program), and Shengyin Xu (Sustainability Manager, Operations), September 2016.

Reviewed with Executive Team on September 6, 2016.

Final approval by Steve Barker (CFOO) on January 11, 2017.

Questions and comments on the policy should be directed to the **food policy team** at sustainability@wri.org.

Sources:

- Arcand, Y., D. Maxime, and R. Zareifard. (2012) "Life cycle assessment of processed food." In J. I. Boye and Y. Arcand (eds.) *Green Technologies in Food Production and Processing*. New York: Springer US.
- CGF, FAO, FUSIONS, UNEP, WBCSD, WRAP, and WRI. (2016) *Food Loss and Waste Accounting and Reporting Standard*. Version 1.0. Washington, DC: WRI.
- Foster, C., K. Green, M. Bleda, P. Dewick, B. Evans, A. Flynn, and J. Mylan. (2006) *Environmental Impacts of Food Production and Consumption: A Report to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs*. Manchester Business School. London: Defra.
- Hedenus, F., S. Wirsenius, and D. J. A. Johansson. (2014) "The importance of reduced meat and dairy consumption for meeting stringent climate change targets." *Climatic Change* 124: 79 – 91.
- Levis, James and Morton Barlaz. (2011) Is Biodegradability a Desirable Attribute for Discarded Solid Waste? Perspectives from a National Landfill Greenhouse Gas Inventory Model. *Environmental Science and Technology*, Vol. 45 (13): 5470 – 5476.
- Lipinski, B., C. Hanson, J. Lomax, L. Kitinoja, R. Waite, and T. Searchinger. (2013) "Reducing Food Loss and Waste." Working Paper, Installment 2 of *Creating a Sustainable Food Future*. Washington, DC: World Resources Institute.
- Monterey Bay Aquarium: Seafood Watch. (2012) *Seafood Recommendations*. Monterey Bay Aquarium. Available at http://www.montereybayaquarium.org/cr/cr_seafoodwatch/sfw_recommendations.aspx?c=ln.
- National Geographic. (2012) *The Hidden Water We Use*. National Geographic. Available at <http://environment.nationalgeographic.com/environment/freshwater/embedded-water/>.
- Raghunathan, R., R. W. Naylor, and W. Hoyer. (2006) "The Unhealthy = Tasty Intuition and Its Effects on Taste Inferences, Enjoyment, and Choice of Food Products." *Journal of Marketing* 70 (4): 170 – 184.
- Ranganathan, J., D. Vennard, R. Waite, P. Dumas, B. Lipinski, T. Searchinger, et al. (2016) "Shifting Diets for a Sustainable Food Future." Working Paper, Installment 11 of *Creating a Sustainable Food Future*. Washington, DC: World Resources Institute. Available at <http://www.wri.org/shiftingdiets>.
- Razza et al. (2009) *Compostable cutlery and waste management: An LCA approach*. *Waste Management*, Vol. 29 (4): 1424 – 1433.
- Searchinger, T. et al. (forthcoming) *World Resources Report: Creating a Sustainable Food Future (final synthesis)*. Washington, DC: World Resources Institute.

- Shepherd, Mark et al. (2003) *An Assessment of the Environmental Impacts of Organic Farming: A review for Defra-funded project OF0405*. DEFRA. Available at <http://archive.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/growing/organic/policy/research/pdf/env-impacts2.pdf>.
- Springmann, M., H. C. J. Godfray, M. Rayner, and P. Scarborough. (2016) "Analysis and valuation of the health and climate change cobenefits of dietary change." *PNAS Early Edition*: www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.1523119113.
- Suher, J., R. Raghunathan, and W. D. Hoyer. (2016) "Eating Healthy or Feeling Empty? How the 'Healthy = Less Filling' Intuition Influences Satiety." *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research* 1 (1): 26 – 40.
- Tuomisto, H. L., I. D. Hodge, P. Riordan, and D. W. Macdonald. (2012) "Does Organic Farming Reduce Environmental Impacts? A Meta-Analysis of European Research." *Journal of Environmental Management* 112: 309–320.
- Xue, Xiaobo and Amy Landis. (2010) *Eutrophication of Food Consumption Patterns*. *Environmental Science and Technology*, Vol. 44: 6450 – 6456.