

SUBSTITUTE CHICKEN FOR BEEF MORE OFTEN

Suggesting replacing some of the beef we eat with other animal products such as chicken, eggs and milk does more for the environment and for health than advising people to go vegan.

This conclusion was reached by Elly Mertens, who got her PhD in Public Health and Sustainability on 8 January. 'Making smaller changes to current eating habits achieves more than advising an "optimal" diet without taking much notice of people's preferences,' says Mertens. Her conclusion is based on a broad study of various different diets among 6500 people in Denmark, the Czech Republic, Italy and France. These countries were chosen to represent a range of European diets. Mertens found in all cases that people ate too few vegetables and too much red and processed meat. 'We know that meat, especially beef, has the biggest carbon footprint and that overconsumption is bad for your health.'

NEIGHBOUR'S EXAMPLE

Based on her findings, Mertens created a model for what she called 'benchmarking eating habits', seeking the optimal balance between

health, sustainability and people's food preferences. Mertens: 'We looked at how people in each country eat and chose the healthiest and most sustainable diet there as a benchmark for the rest of the population. If your neighbour can do it, why can't you?' Mertens thinks it is difficult to find a diet that is both optimally sustainable and optimally healthy. 'A plant-based diet might be the most environmentally friendly, but it lacks certain nutrients, which means you need supplements. There is always a trade-off.'

'If your neighbour can do it, why can't you?'

When proposing changes for the better, Mertens believes it is important to take existing eating habits into account. Recommending that people eat more pulses and nuts, for example, is less realistic and feasible than suggesting they eat more chicken, eggs or milk. 'With these kinds of small steps you achieve more in the end than by setting the bar high from the start. Many recommendations are now geared to a transition

towards a more plant-based diet. That takes no notice of people's preferences and is therefore not realistic for most people. The result is that not many people get on board, and the net effect is much smaller than when a large number of people make a modest change.' **RT**

Restaurant customers appear to be fine with a bit less meat and more vegetables on their plates, as long as the food is well-presented. This finding comes from a study by Wageningen Economic Research in collaboration with Greendish, Unilever Nutrition Research and the Louis Bolk Institute. Read more on resource-online.nl

