

Earth Day:

An App to collect data on diets globally, to help ease the climate crisis

Today is Earth Day. A day to celebrate and cherish the incredible biodiversity and natural resources that our planet offers us. A day for everyone, everywhere to commit to protecting and restoring what we have, now.

The relationship between good nutrition and our climate crisis is complex and not always well understood. A recent international [report](#) by an expert group on climate change highlighted the critical role of our global food systems in climate mitigation and adaptation. In particular, the report speaks to significant changes taking place, such as increases in climate-related food and water-borne diseases and heat waves in cities. The need to move towards sustainable, healthy diets to lower global emissions could not be greater.

Today, the global food system is [a major contributor](#) to greenhouse gas emissions. At the same time, [over 50%](#) of all habitable land is used for food production – a figure which is already beyond the threshold of what [scientists](#) have recommended for planetary health.

At [Intake](#), we are committed to measuring and understanding people's diets to protect biodiversity and ensure greater sustainability in food supply chains. As such, we are developing a Climate Sensitive Diet App to report on the environmental impact of diets by tracking four indicators of planetary health: greenhouse gas emissions, land use, eutrophication potential, and water use, based on Life Cycle Assessment data.

The App is designed for use in a population-based survey to facilitate a simple 24-hour dietary recall, with the dietary recall data collected linked to environmental impact data to allow for automatic reporting of these key environmental metrics related to the planetary boundaries. The design of the App will allow users to easily assess and track the link between population-level dietary patterns, diet quality, and planetary health. The beta version of the App will be completed at the end of 2022 and will have high interoperability, meaning that it can be easily scaled and adapted.

Ultimately, unless governments, civil society, international organisations, and businesses know what people are eating and what foods people have access to, enacting and amending policies to safeguard good nutrition and the environment will continue to be a challenge.

In 2020, the [Eat-Lancet Commission on Food, Planet, Health](#) highlighted the need for diets to fit within planetary boundaries. This important publication laid out what a sustainable, balanced, and healthy diet could look like for the world's almost 8 billion people if we take population growth into account. Yet, actioning mass social norm change towards planetary boundaries requires much better data.



At *Intake*, our technology and tools are designed to aid and inform policy makers across sectors, including health, nutrition, agriculture, economic, social and trade policies. Food fortification legislation, sugar taxes or banning palm oil subsidies, for example, are easier to advocate for and implement with up-to-date data on how diet choices are impacting ecological and environmental indicators.

For many years, urbanisation has been changing diet patterns, particularly for young people. At the same time, rapidly changing trends in global development are putting indigenous knowledge at risk. Yet, indigenous knowledge has the potential to be a guiding force in our global response to the climate crisis. At *Intake*, we honour and protect this knowledge by seeking to develop tools and technologies to better understand what local foods communities are eating day to day. Across all our initiatives at [FHI Solutions](#), we strive to ensure that indigenous knowledge is respected and an integral part of sustainable innovations.

There are many urgently needed responses to support a resilient global food system, thriving biodiversity and ecosystems. Improving the quality and quantity of data to track people's diets is one of them. As we approach the deadline for the [Sustainable Development Goals in 2030](#), our aim at *Intake* and FHI Solutions is to enable governments and other stakeholders to design, implement and track policies and programmes that supports a global vision for healthy, environmentally sustainable diets.

We also encourage far greater investment in innovation across the nutrition - climate mitigation and adaptation nexus; for example, in climate adapted agriculture, innovations to reduce food waste, and creative methods to address social norms, especially with respect to urban diets.

Around the world, Earth Day celebrations are happening. So, let's keep momentum because while our earth nourishes us, it is our collective responsibility to nurture our land, our oceans, and our biodiversity in return.

- Anna Kotenko and Megan Deitchler for *Intake*