

# SIMPLE STEPS TO SHIFT TOWARD A MORE SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEM

Our food system represents important shared ground when it comes to human and planetary health, as well as our collective social, environmental and economic well-being.<sup>1</sup>

In the United States, how we produce and consume food has a bigger impact on Americans' well-being than any other human activity?<sup>2</sup>

As a result of improved understanding of the connections between natural systems and health, as well as an increase in consumer awareness, RDNs in all areas of dietetics are increasingly being called upon to address issues of sustainability and resilience in their daily practices<sup>3</sup>. The 2015 Dietary Guidelines emphasize the importance of shifting to dietary patterns rich in plant-based foods like vegetables, fruits, whole grains, nuts and seeds, and this is being echoed by consumer demand for more plant-centric options from retailers and restaurants<sup>4</sup>.

RDNs are well positioned to meet the growing needs of clients seeking guidance on food choices as they relate to human health and ecological sustainability, and have a unique opportunity to contribute to the creation and expansion of a healthier, more sustainable food supply.<sup>5</sup> Here are top strategies from Kate Geagan, MS, RDN, author of *Go Green, Get Lean: Trim Your Waistline with the Ultimate Low Carbon Footprint Diet*, on how to empower consumers to enjoy a greener diet that is not only incredibly delicious, satisfying and affordable, but can promote high levels of health and performance, too.<sup>6</sup>



## ENJOY A PLANT-FORWARD DIET

- Emphasize an abundance of plant foods as part of a healthy dietary pattern. At meals and snacks, aim to fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables, including plenty of dark green, red and orange choices, plus beans and peas.
- Fill one-fourth of your plate with a variety of nutrient-rich grains at meals, especially whole grains, such as brown rice, quinoa, oatmeal, bulgur, barley, farro, buckwheat or whole-wheat pasta.

## VARY YOUR PROTEIN SOURCES

- According to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Position Paper: Promoting Ecological Sustainability within the Food System, consumers who wish to decrease their ecological impact may consider choosing to consume a diet richer in plants and plant-based proteins, going meatless one day a week, eating less meat per meal, choosing organic or grass-fed meats, eating seasonally and locally, reducing food waste and reducing packaging<sup>7</sup>.
- Include more seafood, especially omega-3 rich sustainable sources such as wild Alaskan salmon, barramundi (U.S. and Vietnam farmed), Pacific sardines (from U.S. and Canada) or albacore tuna (Pacific troll, pole and line) at least two times per week.<sup>8</sup>
- Include a variety of proteins when meeting your daily protein goals. In addition to seafood, lean meats and poultry, include plenty of legumes (beans and peas), nuts, seeds and soy products.
- Leverage globally inspired plant-based culinary strategies in the kitchen<sup>9</sup>. Two easy examples are the USDA's Healthy Mediterranean-Style Eating Pattern and Healthy Vegetarian Eating Pattern resources.



## MAKE THE HEALTHY SHIFT FROM SOLID FATS TO OILS

- Use vegetable oils instead of solid fats (such as butter, stick margarine, shortening, coconut or palm oil and lard) when cooking or baking.
- Increase your intake of foods that naturally contain heart-smart oils, such as seafood and nuts.
- Use nut butters or avocados in place of mayonnaise or butter as spreads on sandwiches and wraps.

## REDUCE FOOD WASTE

According to the USDA, about 90 billion pounds of edible food goes uneaten each year.<sup>10</sup> All of this uneaten food costs the average American about \$370 each year.<sup>11</sup> RDNs have an important role in educating the public about reducing the environmental impact of their diets, especially by reducing food waste through purposeful selection, storage, use and consumption.<sup>12</sup> Here are some tips that can help minimize food waste:

- Use highly perishable items, such as fresh seafood, berries and salad greens, in your first meals home from the grocery store, and utilize longer-lasting foods (such as nuts, canned beans, sweet potatoes or apples) later throughout the week.
- Buy in bulk only if it makes sense. Buying in bulk for non-perishables can be a great way to save money, but store bulk perishables (such as chicken breast) in your freezer if you won't be able to use them quickly to minimize waste.
- Understand food dates and what they mean (best by, use by, sell by).
- Look for “ugly” or misshapen produce at your local grocer or farmers’ market. This type of produce can usually be purchased at a significantly lower cost while providing the same nutrient and health benefits as “perfect” produce. They also help create a market for produce that typically has been thrown away.
- Repurpose and freeze extra food.
- Look for opportunities to donate, recycle and compost food or food containers.



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## ALMOND, FARRO AND BLACK BEAN SALAD WITH CILANTRO

2 ounces slivered almonds  
1 1/2 cups water  
1/3 cup farro  
1 (15-ounce) can black beans, rinsed and drained  
1 cup fresh or frozen, thawed shelled edamame  
1 cup fresh or frozen, thawed green peas  
1/3 cup diced red onion  
1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil  
Grated rind and juice of 1 large lemon  
2 teaspoons Dijon coarse-grain mustard  
1 medium garlic clove, minced  
1/2 teaspoon salt or to taste  
1/8 teaspoon dried red pepper flakes, optional  
1 cup chopped fresh cilantro

Heat a medium saucepan over medium-high heat. Add almonds and cook two minutes or until beginning to lightly brown, stirring frequently. Remove from saucepan and set aside on separate plate.

Add water to saucepan, bring to a boil over high heat, stir in farro, reduce heat to medium-low, cover and simmer for 15 minutes or until just tender. Drain in a fine-mesh sieve and run under cold water to cool quickly. Shake off excess liquid.

Meanwhile, combine remaining ingredients, except cilantro, in a medium bowl. Stir in drained farro and cilantro and mix until blended.

**Note:** For even fresher flavor, add one cup diced cucumber.

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