



SUSTAINABLE FOOD PROVISION IN CHURCH

COMMUNITY & GLOBAL





COMMUNITY & GLOBAL

Sustainable food provision

WHY?

As God's representatives, we contribute to the flourishing of the whole earth community, so will want to think carefully about what we consume. This is not just about the nutritional value of food but also the ethics of production and the carbon footprint involved in its delivery to our church events.

Jesus often shared meals with his followers. As Christians we are encouraged to offer hospitality and to find joy in doing that. This may be to our friends and family or as a demonstration of God's care for the homeless or to host a community celebration.

Food production and its preparation are basic human activities as we all require daily nourishment. Thinking about how we produce and prepare food to glorify God and nourish us, whilst leaving a sustainable legacy for future generations, is high on the agenda for Christians who care about the planet.

HOW?

The organisation Green Christian devised a handy acronym to highlight some of the aspects of food we should consider as 'LOAF' : L = Locally produced, O = Organic, A = Animal Friendly, F = Fairly traded: <https://greenchristian.org.uk/loaf-principles/>

LOCALLY PRODUCED

One of the most helpful ways to keep us connected with our food and understand what goes into its production is to buy food produced locally (Green Christian call this 'The Proximity Principle'). By seeking to support and learn from those who produce our food locally, we reduce food miles and understand more about seasonal production patterns of fruit, vegetables, fish and meat. We can share some of the producers' joys and challenges of producing food. It's harder to do this in urban environments but consider finding Farmers' Markets or locally produced veg box schemes.



COMMUNITY & GLOBAL

Sustainable food provision

Some churches now grow their own fruit and vegetables, partly to increase community involvement, but also to provide local fresh produce for hospitality.

ORGANICALLY GROWN

Organic food is the product of a farming system which avoids the use of man-made fertilisers, pesticides, growth regulators and livestock feed additives. Organic farmers aim to produce high-quality food, using methods that benefit our whole food system, from people to planet, plant health to animal welfare. The Soil Association sets strict widely used standards, to ensure that farms sustain the health of soils, ecosystems, animals and people. The Soil Association also runs certification schemes across food, farming, catering, health and beauty, textiles and forestry, so you can be confident in the credentials of products you buy which are accredited by them: <https://www.soilassociation.org/who-we-are/organic-principles/>

It can be challenging to balance 'Organic' with 'Local'. Green Christian recommends taking the 'proximity' route, for example, by choosing apples from the UK rather than imported organic apples. Do also tell the shop's customer representative that you would like local organic food, to encourage them to stock it in future.

ANIMAL FRIENDLY

Animals are sensate creatures and are particularly vulnerable to human actions. Seek out meat and fish that has been humanely reared and slaughtered. The Sustainable Food Trust, a UK registered charity, suggests five questions to ask your butcher about the ethics of the meat you are buying: <https://sustainablefoodtrust.org/articles/eating-your-values-five-questions-to-ask-your-butcher/>

Labelling can be misleading. 'Outdoor bred' on many pork products does not mean 'free-range'. In 'outdoor bred', the sows stay outside, and the piglets are brought indoors once they are weaned. Compassion in World Farming explain the differences: <https://www.ciwf.org.uk/your-food/meat-poultry/pork-and-bacon/>



COMMUNITY & GLOBAL

Sustainable food provision

In general, the UK has higher standards of animal welfare than many countries around the world. Examples include housing allowing the animal freedom of movement, the restricted use of growth promoters and the treatment of live animals on long-distance transport. The Animal Protection Index ranks 50 countries around the world according to welfare standards and legislation: <https://api.worldanimalprotection.org/>

<https://science.rspca.org.uk/sciencegroup/farmanimals/standards>

FAIRLY TRADED

There will always be food that cannot be produced, in quantity, in Northwestern Europe, including bananas, citrus fruits, tea, and coffee. Some developing countries need currency to purchase pharmaceutical products, medical equipment, alternative energy technologies, and laboratory equipment. And we need food which only they can supply. Following the proximity principle, source only sustainably grown imported food, and where just wages are paid.

The Fairtrade Foundation certifies food, and other products, to indicate that the pay to workers is fair, and enough power has been put into the hands of farmers. In return, these farmers invest in climate-friendly farming techniques, clean water for their community, nurturing women leaders and making sure children get an education: <https://www.fairtrade.org.uk/what-is-fairtrade/>

COMPLEXITIES OF FOOD CHOICES IN OFFERING HOSPITALITY AT CHURCH

Evidence is growing that to feed a growing world population sustainably requires us all to limit the amount of animal protein we eat, choosing instead a more plant-based diet. This will also have beneficial side effects. Less soya grown to feed animals should mean less deforestation, protection of biodiversity and improved welfare for animals.



COMMUNITY & GLOBAL

Sustainable food provision

How we achieve this, whilst also retaining healthy diets and sustainable livelihoods for agricultural workers, means making choices which are sometimes complicated:

- Is it better to eat lamb reared in the UK on grass or to eat soya imported from South America?
- What is the environmental impact of a pepper produced locally under glass (avoiding the need for pesticides) compared to one imported from the Mediterranean where sprays were used?
- How do we provide enjoyable healthy meals for those in need, within a limited budget?
- Cost may be a concern for your church if you are choosing to buy organic or fairly traded food. You could mitigate this by offering a vegetarian meal as your only or primary option, growing your own vegetables or investigating surplus food schemes – where unsold food from supermarkets and restaurants is redistributed to charities.

However you decide to manage the food you offer, healthy sustainable food will be on the global agenda and in Christian discussion for some time to come.

LONGER READS & OTHER RESOURCES

BOOKS

'The Plant-based Diet. A Christian Option?' by Mia Smith, Grove Books, 2019

'A Christian Guide to Environmental Issues' includes a chapter on food, by Martin Hodson and Margot Hodson, Bible Reading Fellowship, 2021.

Sustainweb is an alliance of organisations working together to advocate for a healthy and sustainable food system which is publicly accountable and socially and environmentally responsible. See <https://www.sustainweb.org/> It has well-thought through policy papers on a wide range of topics, including, '*Why sustainable food and farming is key to achieving net zero*', and '*The Case for Local Food*'.



COMMUNITY & GLOBAL

Sustainable food provision

Compassion in World Farming, established 50 years ago, campaigns peacefully to end factory farming, and offer informative resources and articles: <https://www.ciwf.org.uk/>

The TABLE website, a collaboration of three universities from Sweden, Germany and the UK, seeks to facilitate informed discussions about how the food system can become sustainable, resilient, just, and ultimately 'good': <https://www.tabledebates.org/>

Listen to the group's regular podcasts: <https://www.tabledebates.org/podcast>