



Carbon footprint

A climate friendly meal consists of many vegetables and less meat. Discarded food products are also an issue regarding greenhouse gas emissions

Producing and consuming food products accounts for 22% to 31% of the EU member states' total impact on the climate, according to calculations made under the EU's Environmental Impact of Products (EIPRO) studies. That is what we call 'food products' carbon footprint'.

Meat and meat products are the food items with the greatest climate impact, followed by milk, butter and cheese. Europe's total consumption of meat and dairy products accounts for about 14% of the impact on global warming caused Europe's overall consumption. The smallest climate impact comes from plant-based food such as outdoor-grown vegetables, flour, grain and bread. The carbon footprint of fish and shellfish shows great variations, with lobsters and frozen shelled shrimps and prawns as the largest climate offenders, and mussels as the most climate friendly. Fresh flatfish are on a level with chicken and pork, while fresh wild cod is lower.

Life-cycle analyses

The carbon footprint of food products is determined using so-called life-cycle analyses. When a food product's carbon footprint is determined, the climate impact is assessed for all parts of the production chain 'from cradle to grave'. This means

that the calculation includes not just the climate impact resulting from production on the farm, but also the climate impact of what the farm consumes (e.g. imported feed and artificial fertiliser) and of what it transfers elsewhere (e.g. animal manure sold to another farm). In addition, the climate impact of transport, food preparation (cutting, heat treatment, freezing etc.) and packaging is also included.

Eat more greens, less meat

We can reduce the carbon footprint of food by eating less meat and more vegetables. Emissions of greenhouse gases are greater during production of animal-based food than production of vegetable-based food. Meat has the largest climate impact, with beef as the great offender, with a climate impact that is 4-8 times higher than that of pork and chicken meat. Milk is the animal-based product with the lowest climate impact. For wild fish, the greatest contribution towards climate impact is from the fuel-intensive fishing process. However, the climate impact of 1 kg wild cod is lower than the impact of 1 kg chicken. Other factors such as the freezing of food products increase the carbon footprint considerably.

Outdoor-grown vegetables and potatoes have the lowest climate impact per kilo.

Climate-friendly food is healthy food

Studies show that advice about dietary changes given to ensure health and nutrition harmonise closely with the guidelines on dietary changes given with regard to the climate. However, data about CO₂ consequences are not sufficiently detailed to allow an authoritative basis for interpreting dietary advice in a climate perspective.

Discarded food products

Figures released by the Danish Environmental Protection Agency show that private households are responsible for 89% of the total food wastage in Denmark. The food waste in households equals 10-20% of the food products bought, with meat and dairy products at the higher end (18-20% are thrown out). Households therefore need planning tools that can help with menu proposals and buying management so the waste can be reduced.

A probable synergy effect would be reduced private transport in connection with better-planned shopping.



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