

How to address the transition towards sustainable diets ?

“Modeling the drivers of a widespread shift to sustainable diets” is an article written by Eker *et al.* in 2019 and published in Nature. It analyses our diet habits from a behavioural standpoint and strives to identify which leverages could be used to transform these, as well as their potential consequences on the worldwide food system. Three key points in it have caught the attention of “La Fabrique Écologique”.

#1 Agriculture is a major stake for the environmental transition, accounting for more than a quarter of the worldwide greenhouse gas emissions according to *the Institut Polytechnique de Paris*, and because of its huge contribution to deforestation. Many studies have shown that lowering the overall meat consumption would significantly reduce the impact of the food system on freshwater uses, ocean acidification, ecosystems balance and climate change. For instance, limiting all of ourselves to one meal a week with red meat, and one with white meat every two days, would be enough to halve the CO₂ emissions of the agriculture sector by 2050 and to reduce the surface dedicated to feeding cattle instead of feeding humans. This would also lead to less space needed for agriculture, and thus less destruction for natural habitats.

#2 Although red meat consumption does diminish in some countries, social resistances prevent it from reaching a level which would benefit the environment. Among these are tastes preferences, traditions, ideological beliefs, and awareness gap on the influence of our diet on climate change. As highlighted in the article, we should first and foremost focus on turning big meat-consumers toward more sustainable diets. Indeed, even if a large amount of the small to medium meat-eating population would become vegetarians overnight, we would overall reduce CO₂ emissions and fertilizers uses less than if we were able to lower the consumption of big meat-consumers.

#3 Four diet habits scenarios have been investigated by the authors, in order to identify the main drivers of the share of vegetarians in the global population. They conclude that the top two leverages are social norms and *self-efficacy*, in other words the confidence one person has in its own ability to meet the targets set. These two factors would therefore be much more influential than health or risk awareness related to climate change. Last but not least, according to their model, young people seem much more open and prone to changing their diet habits: they could well be our best bet for transitioning toward sustainable diets.

Food habits in France

In the survey *Baromètre 2024 Sobriétés et Modes de vie* made by the ADEME agency, 3% of the French people say they are vegetarians or vegans and 16% flexitarians. 30% eat meat three to five times a week, and 21 % every day. More than a quarter of the total say they are planning to lower their meat consumption in the future. A study by IFOP and FranceAgriMer from May 2021 highlights the fact that for non-meat based diets, women (67%), under 35 years old (41%), graduates (45%) and upper middle class (47%) are overrepresented. Several initiatives, like the EGalim law adopted in 2019 which demands that schools provide at least one vegetarian lunch per week, show some progress but their results will not be enough. The bulk of the work remains to be done.

The opinion of Pauline Bureau, Vice-Chair of "La Fabrique Écologique"

“The issue of meat-consumption shows us the limits of a technocentric approach to the environmental transition. Here, we should work primarily on our communication strategies to tackle the social norms at stake. And these are not set in stone!”