

Eating for health and the planet: Shifting discourses of sustainable healthy diets

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The global pandemic and extensive extreme climate hazards have propelled public awareness to unprecedented levels on lifestyle changes, at the center of which is healthy and responsible eating. In practice, however, achieving the optimal balance between maximizing health benefits and minimizing environmental impacts through dietary changes is often not as straight-forward. Often, food preferences and culinary decisions are the results from socioeconomic conditions and cultural norms, and, ultimately, their interactions with public discourses about dietary choices. It is therefore crucial to investigate such public discourses to inform sustainable dietary transitions. This paper traces the shifting public discourses about sustainable healthy diets and investigates the dynamics behind the changes, with a primary focus on the United States. It utilizes diverse sources of publicly available data –i.e., government policies, dietary guidelines, media, and marketing communications –to map out key trends in public discourses about the relationship between diets, health, and sustainability. Adopting an interpretative approach of qualitative data analysis, it demonstrates the role of key players –from international organizations and national government agencies to private companies and marketing agencies –and cultural norms in shaping the narratives about eating for health and for the planet. By identifying ambiguities and contradictions in these narratives, the paper sheds light on the challenges and controversies in the societal dietary transitions towards sustainability.

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