



ECEHH Research Insight:

Food sources, nutrition and health

A bite size summary of research, Aug 2023

Availability of local nutritious food, including own production and sharing, can improve healthy nutrition and dietary diversity.



Who is this relevant to?

Policy makers, practitioners and researchers in health, nutrition, food systems and agriculture.

Background

Researchers from the Universities of the West Indies, the South Pacific, Exeter and Cambridge together with NGO partners developed and tested methods to investigate the current nutritional quality of local diets and the contribution of community-based food production in St Vincent & the Grenadines and Fiji.

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) have some of the highest rates globally of obesity, diabetes and related non-communicable diseases. A diet of highly processed foods over fruit, vegetables and fibre is a major determinant of this burden.

SIDS have experienced a 'nutrition transition' over the past several decades; locally grown traditional foods have been replaced in the diet by imported, predominantly calorie-dense, processed and ultra-processed foods.

Findings

In the studied settings, purchasing was the most common way of sourcing food. However, 68% (Fiji) and 45% (SVG) of participants regularly (>weekly) consumed their own produce, and 5% (Fiji) and 33% (SVG) regularly consumed borrowed/exchanged/bartered food.

Regular consumption of food from a supermarket was associated with positive aspects of diet in both countries, while consumption from small shops indicated higher consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages and meat, indicating that more choice might improve dietary diversity.

We found evidence of an association between regular consumption of own produced food and greater fruit consumption (in both Fiji and SVG), but no association between own produced food and dietary diversity.



Recommendations

There is a lack of robust evidence on interventions to improve diet in SIDS. Our evidence review suggests that local food approaches may promote effectiveness, through mechanisms of cultural and contextual relevance.

Further development and evaluation of interventions is urgently required to increase the comparability of these studies, to help guide policy on improving nutrition in SIDS.



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