**Evaluating the Environmental Impact of the Food Production and Consumption System and Options for Reducing This Impact by Making Healthy Dietary Choices**

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**ABSTRACT**

The environmental impact of food consumption patterns is an issue of growing concern in the Netherlands and other European countries. The greatest concern is not the direct impacts of the activities of consumers, such as the purchase, storage, preparation and wastage of food, but the impacts of the production chain from crop growing and livestock farming to the consumer products available in the shops.

In Europe, food consumption and related production chains make a significant contribution to the total environmental impacts of production and consumption activities. A recent European study estimated this contribution to be as much as 20% to 30%, depending on the specific impact category. Protein-rich products, high-calorie foods and beverages make the greatest contribution. In most European countries more food is consumed than required, or even desired, from a nutritional point of view. There is therefore a big opportunity to reduce environmental impact by reducing over-consumption.

Other options for reducing the impacts of consumption are related to a change in diet, such as a shift to a more vegetarian menu or a more local and seasonal menu. These shifts certainly do have potential, both for the environment and human health. However, the environmental reduction is often difficult to estimate because the environmental impact of the substitute products is highly variable.

On the production side, the increasing efficiency of production automatically leads to a reduction in some environmental impacts. However, the global trends in environmental impact and the depletion of natural resources caused by food production are too alarming to make this a reliable option.