Loma Linda Researchers Propose New Field of Public Health: Environmental Nutrition

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Paper is published in the
American Journal of Clinical Nutrition

LOMA LINDA, CA, March 28, 2016 – Researchers from Loma Linda University School of Public Health (LLUSPH) have formally proposed a new field of research and education within the public health remit. The new field, Environmental Nutrition (EN), is the integration of earth and life sciences with nutrition science. EN seeks to address the sustainability of food systems by researching the complex relationships within those systems that impact public health at a local and global scale.

Inputs, processes and outputs of food systems have significant public health implications such as air and water contamination with hazardous chemicals, animal waste, and zoonotic disease. Certain food groups have a much larger resource requirement and hence environmental footprint, with animal-based products generally having the greatest impacts and plant foods having the least.

“The types and quantities of resources used influence the type and amount of pollution created, which in turn can
compromise the quality of natural resources,” said Helen Harwatt, PhD and research fellow at LLUSPH. “It is important to identify foods that have both minimum environmental impacts and maximum health benefits, as well as develop food labels that communicate such information to consumers.”

In an effort to clarify the interaction between current food systems, the environment, and public health, EN is also proposing an Environmental Nutrition Model (ENM). ENM is intended to provide a useful educational tool to explain, understand, and ultimately contribute to the necessary modifications and changes to the current food system to achieve sustainability.

“The ENM will help show how the process of food production, such as processing, transportation, storage, consumption, and disposal practices, directly impacts the environment and affects climate change,” said Joan Sabaté, MD, DrPH, Executive Director of the Center for Nutrition, Healthy Lifestyle & Disease Prevention and professor at LLUSPH.

Currently, most food life cycle assessments focus only on food production. LLUSPH researchers say there is a need to expand the analysis to include other stages of the food system.

“Given the intrinsic relationships between the environmental sciences and the nutritional sciences, it is imperative that public health research and practice begin focusing on the new discipline of environmental nutrition,” said Sam Soret, PhD, Executive Director of the Center for Community Resilience and Associate Director of the Environmental Nutrition Research Group at LLUSPH. “We need to address the sustainability of our food systems.”


The Environmental Nutrition team at LLUSPH specializes in assessing and understanding the environmental sustainability and health impacts of foods and dietary patterns. Topics include climate change, water use, biodiversity loss, chronic disease and food security. Exploring both the health and environmental impacts of our dietary choices is an emerging field, to which the authors of this paper have made a number of contributions. Further information about environmental nutrition, including previous work by the authors, can be found at [environmentalnutrition.org](http://environmentalnutrition.org). Information about LLUSPH can be found at [publichealth.llu.edu](http://publichealth.llu.edu).

**About Loma Linda University Health**

Loma Linda University Health includes Loma Linda University’s eight professional schools, Loma Linda University Medical Center's six hospitals and more than 900 faculty physicians located in the Inland Empire of Southern
California. Established in 1905, Loma Linda University Health is a global leader in education, research and clinical care. It offers over 100 academic programs and provides quality health care to 40,000 inpatients and 1.5 million outpatients each year. A Seventh-day Adventist organization, Loma Linda University Health is a faith-based health system with a mission "to continue the teaching and healing ministry of Jesus Christ."