The Power of the Plate: Fact Sheet The Case for Regenerative Organic Agriculture in Improving Human Health

Summary

The world is in desperate need of healing. The increased industrialization of our food system has led to both environmental degradation and epidemic levels of lifestyle-related diseases.

"The Power of the Plate" is a new white paper led by Rodale Institute and the Plantrician Project and authored by farmers, doctors and soil scientists—offering a holistic analysis of agriculture, nutrition, and medicine and their deeply intertwined relationship.

This paper recommends a shift to regenerative healthcare—a system in which farming and healthcare work together to inform a prevention-based approach to human and environmental health, and solutions to get there.

Download the full paper and a toolkit for sharing the findings at <u>RodaleInstitute.org/poweroftheplate</u>

How Did We Get Here?

The way we farm and the way we eat are inextricably linked, and the rising prevalence of unhealthy diets has paralleled the rise of industrialized agriculture. Beginning in the 1800s, farming shifted away from small, diversified operations to consolidated entities focused on maximizing yields of a few crops that are easy to ship, store, and process—in particular cereal grains—while increasing its use of chemical inputs to improve crop yields.

The toxic byproducts of our conventional farming systems have made their way into the food we eat, the air we breathe, and the water we drink, correlating with an increase in cancer, autoimmune diseases, and antibiotic resistance [i-xiii]. Additionally, industrial agriculture has depleted the nutrients in our food, contributing to "hidden hunger." The focus on cereal grains has allowed for the cheap, abundant processed foods that make up the Standard American Diet, while very little U.S. agriculture is focused on fresh, whole foods like fruits, nuts, vegetables, and legumes.

Key Findings

- While total life expectancies may have increased since 1950, healthy life expectancies and quality of life have not. [ix]
- More than 71% of global deaths annually are directly related to non-communicable lifestyle diseases such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and chronic lung disease. [x]
- The Standard American Diet derives more than half of total calories from highly processed foods and a disappointingly insufficient 11% of calories from fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, and nuts. [xi]
- Our modern industrial farming systems grow fruits, vegetables, and nuts on just 3% of cropland. [xii] Many conventional and processed foods lack nutrient density, contributing to "hidden hunger" and the rise of lifestyle diseases. [xiii]
- In addition to lacking nutrition, industrial farming directly and indirectly affects human health via exposure to potentially endocrine-disrupting chemicals and through environmental pollutants that may increase the risk of dementia, Alzheimer's, cancer, and other chronic conditions. [xiv-xx]
- Despite a clear link between food and health, medical students receive fewer than 25 hours of nutrition education during their four years of medical school, instead focusing on a pharmaceutical-based disease management system. [xxi]
- By integrating food and healthcare systems, transitioning to regenerative organic farming on more cropland, and emphasizing nutrition and lifestyle choices that prevent disease, we could radically change the future of human health.

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Plantrician Project

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Why It Matters

Our medical system is overburdened attempting to treat lifestyle-related diseases with pharmaceutical intervention rather than an organic, whole-food dietary lifestyle. At the same time, conventional farming systems contribute up to a quarter of global greenhouse emissions and rely on toxic inputs that threaten biodiversity, clean air, water, and our soil's long-term capacity to produce food—all of which ultimately jeopardize the future of human health. With fewer than 60 harvests left before current topsoil levels are depleted, we can't afford to wait [xxii].

Solutions

Regenerative Organic Agriculture

We could increase the availability of nutrientdense foods and initiate regeneration of the soil by shifting from an industrial agriculture system to regenerative organic farming. Regenerative organic agriculture eliminates toxic inputs, maximizes soil coverage, crop diversity, and nutrient density, while minimizing soil disturbance and integrating livestock. Regenerative organic systems replenish topsoil levels, ensuring a secure future for food production, protecting critical resources, and removing the dangers of chemicals in the food system.

Regenerative & Preventative Healthcare

A shift in our medical system from a pharmaceutical-based disease management system to an integrative system founded on lifestyle medicine—supported by whole, nutrient-dense organic foods—could dramatically alter the trajectory of chronic disease and create a healthier future. Healthcare must also become regenerative, with a greater emphasis on nutrition education, lifestyle medicine, and a holistic, prevention-based approach to human health.

Spread the Word

Access a toolkit full of graphics and social media posts at <u>www.RodaleInstitute.org/poweroftheplate</u> and use #poweroftheplate on social media.

Recommendations

1) Emphasize education and collaboration between medical professionals, farmers, and consumers to identify the positive impacts of a whole foods, organic diet

2) Integrate nutritional education into the medical education curriculum.

3) Implement localized, integrated health initiatives that combine medical treatment with access to organic fruits and vegetables and incentivize medical professionals to implement these practices.

4) Fund more research for specialty crops and regenerative organic farming to improve technology & lower costs and incentivize these farming methods.
5) Provide increased financial & institutional support for farmers transitioning to regenerative organic practices.
6) Encourage food companies to support regenerative organic farmers.



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