

## OUR FOOD SYSTEM AND CLIMATE CHANGE ARE STRONGLY LINKED TO EACH OTHER

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A strongly discussed topic over the recent months and years has been climate change, how it happened and how to prevent it. In order to protect our environment, we are advised to lessen carbon emissions, walk instead of drive, mitigate and reduce our use of plastic. But no one really talks about how our food system affects climate change – and it does.

The way farmers produce their crop can already have a substantial impact on our planet. With the right techniques millions of litres of water can be conserved every year, especially in deserts. Zai, for example, is a method used in the Sahel zone in Africa which proved to have a positive influence on the soil in the case of droughts and water management in general. For this tactic, 20 – 30cm pits are dug in fields in between the crops. These are necessary to catch water and concentrated compost which generate a mixture that attracts little bugs who then proceed to drill holes through the fields. Because of these tunnels the water is able to spread over wider distances in the ground and keep the crops moist, which mitigates the impact of the often-occurring droughts in this area.

Another farming practice is monoculture and in contrast to Zai, this technique has a lot of negative impact on the environment. Annually planting the same crop in the same area depletes the nutrients from the soil that the plant relies on and leaves it weak and unable to support healthy growth. Continuous monoculture, or monocropping, can lead to the quicker build-up of pests and diseases, and then their rapid spread. Because soil structure and quality are so poor, farmers are forced to use chemical fertilizers to encourage plant growth and fruit production. These fertilizers, in turn, disrupt the natural makeup of the soil and contribute further to nutrient depletion. Polyculture, the mixing of different crops, increases the likelihood that one or more of the crops will be resistant to any particular virus. Studies have shown that planting a mixture of crop strains in the same field can combat disease effectively.

By far the biggest problem with our food system and climate change is probably long-distance shipping. Buying products from the other side of the world doesn't only affect the sales of local farmers in a negative way, it also contributes badly to the world's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. The higher these emissions are the worse it reflects on our ecosystem. If it gets warmer, the oceans will also warm up. Only a slight change in water temperature can have disastrous consequences on the marine life. A rise of only a few degrees Celsius could kill millions of fish.

Our food system and climate change are strongly linked to each other. If we don't take care of how we produce and transport food, our ecosystem is going to collapse. What we consume has a great impact on our lives. The next time you go grocery shopping maybe buy the strawberries from your local farmer and not the ones from Chile. Help save the environment.