Eating green

The sustainable way forward

Primavera pesto pasta
It has never been more important for South Africans to take a closer look at what they dish up on their plates. Food not only impacts our health, but it also has a tremendous effect on our natural resources, animals and environment. We are in the midst of an environmental catastrophe with the drought taking its toll on our agriculture and everyday lifestyle – and our health isn’t better off either. With the phenomenal benefits that a plant-based diet brings, it comes as no surprise that an increasing number of South Africans are opting for plant-based food. Eating plant-based food at least once a week can help reduce the serious health, environmental and animal welfare problems that stem from raising 77 billion land animals and countless aquatic animals for food each year.

I run the Green Monday programme in South Africa: a fun, flexible and delicious global movement that has been implemented in six different countries, of which South Africa was the first. The movement encourages South Africans to eat ‘green’ in order to reap the many benefits of fruits, vegetables, legumes and whole grains. Eating green is great for our health. Obesity, cancer, cardiovascular disease, dementia, and high blood pressure are some of the life-threatening chronic diseases that South Africans battle against daily. We are undergoing a ‘nutrition transition’ – shifting from a traditional diet to a more Westernised one, with greater fat and sugar intake, and a significant increase in animal products. In just 10 years, our pork intake has increased by 77% and poultry intake rose 63%. We are consuming more beef, eggs and dairy.

In South Africa, nearly 30% of men and 56% of women are either overweight or obese, according to the Medical Research Council (MRC) and “growing rates of overweight and obesity worldwide are linked to a rise in chronic diseases such as cancer, cardiovascular disease and diabetes,” the World Health Organisation (WHO) cautious.

Most South Africans are unaware that there is a delicious solution to their health hitches: studies have proven that eating a predominantly plant-based diet can prevent, treat, and in some cases, even reverse chronic diseases. The health of our planet is compromised by our bad food choices. Raising animals for food contributes to dangerous climate change, deforestation, water pollution and water shortages. The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) has said that the animal agriculture sector is “one of the top two or three most significant contributors to the most serious environmental problems, at every scale from local to global.”

Studies show that farm animal production alone accounts for 14.5% of the world’s greenhouse gas emissions. Producing meat, milk and eggs also contributes to depleting South Africa’s scarce water resources. Whether for growing feed, cleaning housing enclosures, hydrating the animals, disposing of their waste or disinfecting slaughtering equipment, animal agriculture requires huge amounts of water – we are desperately trying to save.

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This year, South Africa faced its worst drought yet, forcing citizens to implement extreme measures to save every last drop. According to the Department of Water and Environmental Affairs, the demand for water in South Africa will be outstripped by 2025. Sixty percent of our water supply is used for agricultural use, including animal agriculture. Amazingly, it takes more than 4 000 litres of water to produce a kilogram of chicken meat and four times as much to produce a kilogram of beef.

Another environmental problem that stems from animal agriculture is land degradation. In South Africa we use more land to raise and feed farm animals than for any other single purpose. More than 97% of soy, maize and more than 60% of the barley and corn produced globally are fed to farm animals. Farm animal production is responsible for the degradation of approximately one-fifth of global pastures and rangelands.

Finally, eating more plant-based food saves millions of animals. More than one billion animals were slaughtered in 2013 in South Africa alone. The majority of chicken, meat and eggs produced in South Africa come from animals intensively confined in factory farms, their lives bearing no resemblance to the way most of us envision farm life. Eating plant-based offers so many benefits, there’s really no reason why we shouldn’t consider adding more ‘green’ meals to our diet.

You don’t have to compromise on flavour, plant-based foods taste incredible and there are so many options available – whether you are cooking at home or dining out. With the Green Monday movement, we are trying to make it as easy as possible for South Africans to do so. We’ve implemented green meal options in university residence dining halls, helped restaurants create veg-friendly menus, and worked with government departments to teach communities how to cook nutritious plant-based dishes. 🌿
SPINACH AND POTATO HOTPOT
Recipe by Leozette Roode

INGREDIENTS
- 1 bunch of fresh spinach
- 4 potatoes, chopped in chunks
- 4 tomatoes, chopped in chunks
- 1 onion, chopped finely
- 2 tablespoons oil
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon of curry powder
- ¼ teaspoon of turmeric

METHOD
- Cook potatoes till tender, drain and set aside.
- Fry chopped onions in oil and add spices.
- Add potatoes and cover in onion mix.
- Add tomatoes and cook for another two minutes.
- Add spinach and cook until just wilted.
- Mix together well and serve with rice or samp and beans.
ISIDUDU (SOFT PORRIDGE) & CURRIED CABBAGE
Recipe by Funeka Zokufa

INGREDIENTS
- 750 ml cooked pumpkin
- 1 litre water
- 625 ml maize meal
- 60 ml sugar
- 5 ml salt

Curried cabbage:
- 65 ml oil
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 750 ml cabbage, finely chopped
- 2 potatoes, peeled, diced and boiled
- 3 garlic cloves, crushed
- 15 ml curry powder
- 15 ml ground paprika
- Salt to taste

METHOD
1. To make isidudu, boil water, then add sugar, salt and pumpkin, stirring to mix.
2. Add maize meal and mix well.
3. Leave to simmer for 30 minutes, stirring occasionally.
4. Heat oil and add onion, cabbage, potatoes, garlic, curry, paprika and salt and sauté until soft.
5. To serve, spoon curried cabbage over isidudu.

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