Is healthy eating healthy for the environment?

The BCFN Double Food Pyramid

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INTRODUCTION

It is generally known that proper nutrition is an essential condition to health. This is a natural law that; however, has not received due attention in the last few decades. Indeed, the growing impact of disorders related to overeating serves as testimony of this last observation. Common disorders are: obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular pathologies – in people of all ages, including the younger portion of the population. Barilla Center for Food & Nutrition (BCFN) to the re-proposal of the food pyramid, 20 years after its conception, which has gained ample recognition and foothold in the scientific and nutritional world. This elaboration of the food pyramid put forth by BCFN has been updated to carefully integrate the latest findings by research. The second reason involves global warming and, more in general, the impact of man's activities on the environment.

STARTING FROM THE NUTRITIONAL PYRAMID

The starting point is the Nutrition Pyramid, which is divided into six sections that scale downwards to contain each nutritional food group. The base of the Pyramid contains Food of Vegetable Origin, while climbing towards the top reveals food that calls for less frequent consumption. The Environmental Pyramid was composed by associating each food group with its environmental impact and placing them in a decreasing fashion to generate an upside-down pyramid in comparison to the nutritional pyramid whose top layer contains the food group that yields greatest environmental impact and bottom-most layer is reserved for the food group with least environmental impact.

COMPOSING THE ENVIRONMENTAL PYRAMID

ASSOCIATION BETWEEN THE TWO PYRAMIDS

There is a reclassification of food that goes beyond their positive impact on health, encompassing their impact on the environment, as well. These values are overlapped in descending order to obtain an upside-down pyramid that, in good measure, re-proposes the same succession of foods.

Such elaboration is called "Double Pyramid".
The Double Pyramid was put together by associating the nutrition pyramid to the environmental pyramid, and placing the environmental impact of each food group in decreasing order.

A single **food model**,of **two different objectives** that share fundamental importance for man: **health and environmental**.

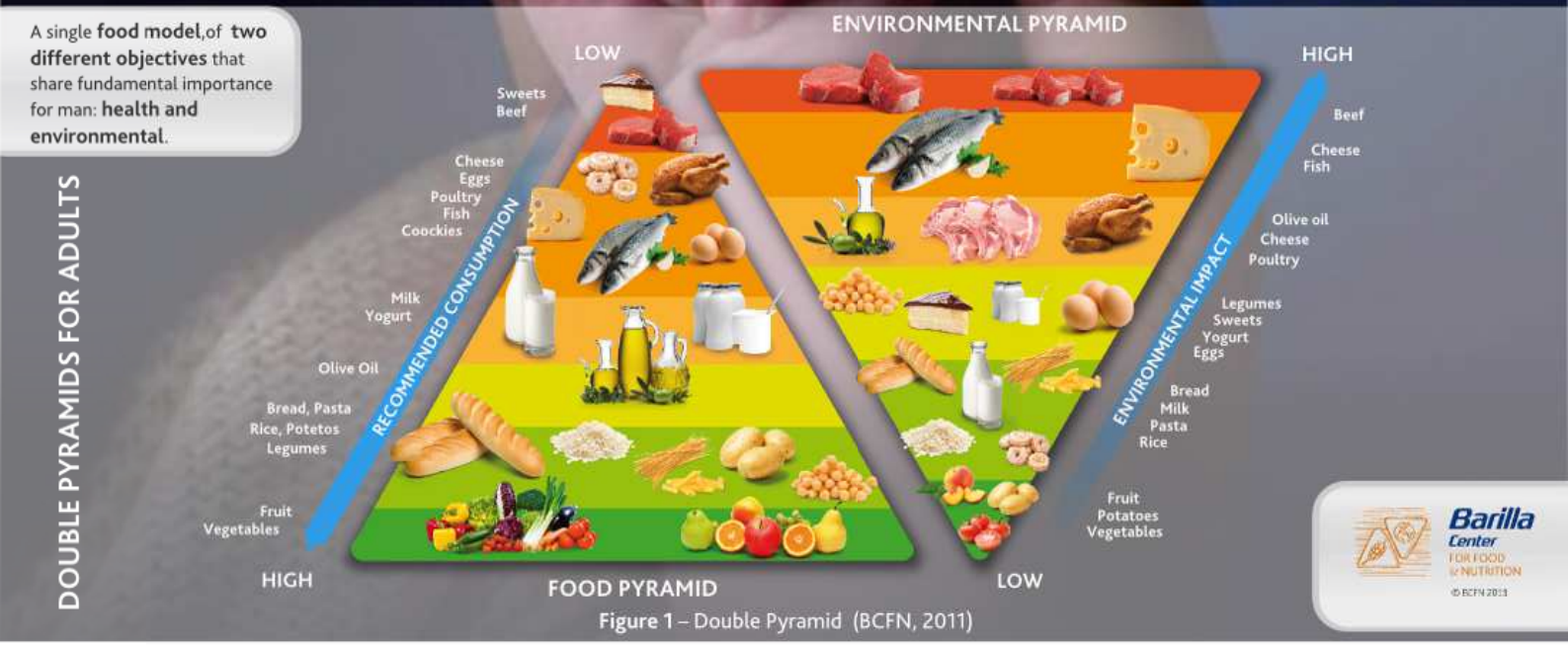

Figure 1 – Double Pyramid (BCFN, 2011)

It has been demonstrated that following a diet put forward by the traditional food-nutrition pyramid not only leads to an improvement in quality of life (longer life-span and enhanced health conditions), but also yields a decisively lower impact, better expressed as Ecological Footprint (Figure 2), on the environment. Indeed, food that should be consumed in greater quantities, for example following the Mediterranean diet, fits into the category that inflicts less environmental impact overall. Vice-versa, foods falling into a recommendation of limited quantity consumption have also the higher impact on the environment

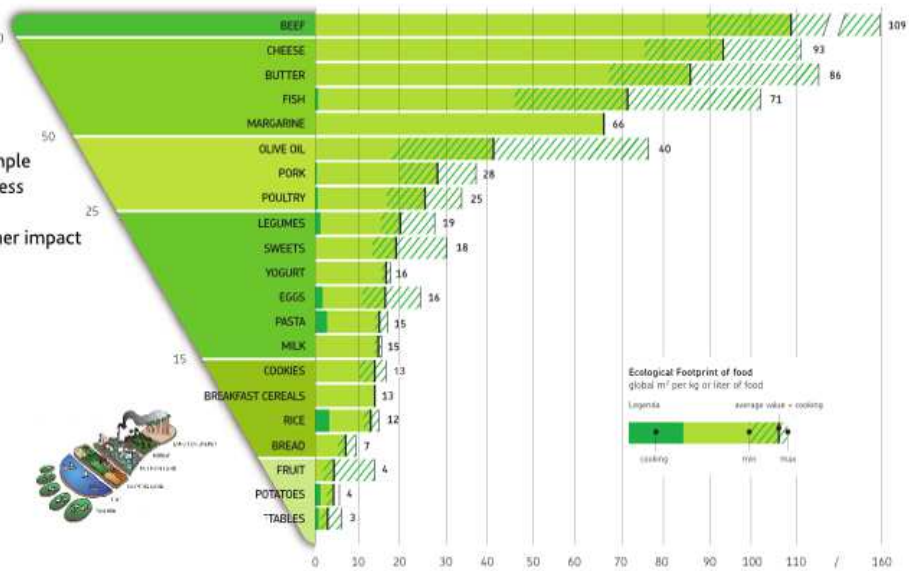

Figure 2 – Ecological Footprint of Food -environmental impacts used for the construction of Double Pyramid (BCFN, 2011)

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