

SPRING
2023

NUTRITION NEWSLETTER

THE GRAPEVINE

Teachers College, Columbia University



Photo Credit: www.Carva.com

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“Food Scraps in My Grandfather’s Fridge: Uncovering the Legacy & Story of a Holocaust Survivor through Food & Memories”

By: Mirel Grossman

As a child, when visiting my grandfather's house, finding something decent to eat was always an interesting experience. When rummaging through his refrigerator, some strange food items would be mixed among the groceries. My grandfather had a habit of carefully amassing an arsenal of food scraps that he saved but rarely ate. He would gather items such as a pot with a few teaspoons of leftover soup, a Saran-wrapped plate with the last two bites of his lunch, a piece of dried-out cooked chicken, and so

on. These scraps were individually wrapped and lined his refrigerator shelves like little trophies. As an immigrant with the resolve to succeed in every area of their life, nobody ever questioned his food-saving quirk. Likewise, our family knew never to question his idiosyncrasies, as sometimes the painful truth is best left untold.

Born in a small Romanian village in 1925, my Zeidy (the Yiddish term from grandfather) was the fifth of six siblings.

Continued on page 4



Fresh off the Vine: Events & Announcements



Photo Credit: Katie Baird

HealthNuts Update: This March, HealthNuts brought back our pre-COVID book club tradition. Students met at Dr. Koch’s apartment for a delicious dinner and thought-provoking discussion with Chloe Sorvino, the author of “Raw Deal,” an expose of the U.S. meat industry.

Congratulations to our Class of 2023 Graduates!



Photo Credit: Nicci Schock

Join the Grapevine!

We are looking for contributing authors for the Grapevine. Whether you are an avid writer or new to writing, this is a great opportunity to experiment, learn, and get involved. Let us know what you are interested in and we'll help you to turn your idea into a story.

Email us at grapevinetceditor@gmail.com to get involved!

 Follow us on Instagram @tc_columbia_nutrition

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Letter From the Editors

Dear Students, Faculty, Alumni and Staff,

Welcome to the Grapevine's Spring Issue! As we continue to explore the important intersections between food and social justice, food policy, nutrition, and sustainability in the food systems, this issue comprises a diverse array of timely, relevant and thought-provoking articles written by our brilliant contributors.

Mirel's soulful personal essay, *Food Scraps in My Grandfather's Fridge: Uncovering the Legacy & Story of a Holocaust Survivor through Food & Memories*, is a beautiful story that explores her cultural identity and honors the memory of her grandfather, who worked tirelessly to help provide food and a sense of purpose for his community. Her grandfather's legacy continues to this day, through Mirel's dedication as a volunteer for [Me for We](#), a food pantry committed to providing meals to Holocaust survivors and senior communities in New York City. This reminds us to feel and reciprocate kindness and grace as we continue to do our part in promoting food security and equity across different communities.

Throughout the issue, our contributors have explored a wide range of topics on food and health policies, including: an insightful interview with Dr. Jen Cadenhead and Stephanie Loui from the [Tisch Food Center](#), on the important role of food advocacy, and an intriguing analysis on [American Academy of Pediatrics \(AAP\) guidelines on treating childhood obesity](#) by Alison. Furthermore, Jerianne's article on plant-based inpatient meal implementations provided perspective on the nutrition and sustainability interventions happening across New York City, while Wency's sophisticated reflection on Southeast Asia's palm oil trade illustrated the connections between international environmental policy, environmental racism, and the livelihood of the communities in the Global South.

Last but not the least, our TC nutrition community had a fruitful year of celebration and many beautiful events organized by HealthNuts. As we enter warmer days, we hope you take the opportunity to rest and rejuvenate with our delicious recipes and feel empowered and inspired by the incredible stories of our TC community.



Thu Thu May Oo

Co-Editor



Alison Garbarini

Co-Editor

Food Scraps in My Grandfather's Fridge: *Continued*

Although his family was poor, they had what they needed and were surrounded by love. At least, this is what I've been told when viewing his one surviving family photograph. In 1940 the Nazis invaded his hometown, and his family was scattered throughout Europe.

His siblings all perished in the Holocaust, leaving him alone by age 15. Although my grandfather could never bring himself to speak of the Holocaust, he has relayed a single story to which he credits his survival.

This story takes place after a day's labor at Schachendorf, an Austrian imprisonment camp. Starving, my Zeidy recalls how he fell asleep under a tall tree on his last breath of life. While asleep, he dreamt that he was back at home with all of his family sitting at a table overflowing with food. Unconsciously scratching the earth around him as he slept, his hands stumbled across a few moldy apples. This small discovery was a thrilling victory for his starving body. He sucked every bit of juice out of the apples, nourishing himself to make it through that day and appreciating the kind gift that was sent his way.

Through five years of imprisonment and slavery, my grandfather's body became frail, but his determination grew stronger than ever. After his liberation, he vowed to do whatever it took to build himself a better life and sought asylum in Canada. Penniless and alone at 21, he taught himself the meat-trading industry. His desire to feed and provide for others gave him a sense of purpose, and he poured his heart and soul into his business. Although my Zeidy displayed a tough exterior due to the horrors he experienced throughout his life, he always had a soft spot for those struggling. If *anyone* entered his business who was hungry and unable to afford food, he would give them prepared food free of charge, no questions asked. He was also known to create employment positions for those seeking a job and took care of his community. Proud of his life's work, he named his business after his surname, Perl, and over the next 60 years, that name became synonymous with kindness and generosity.



Photo Credit: www.Canva.com

To honor his legacy, I began volunteering at a New York food pantry, named Me for We. Me for We is a nonprofit organization that administers weekly food packages for hundreds of Holocaust Survivors in the New York metro area. An estimated 1 in 3 Holocaust survivors and 10% of elderly people live below the poverty line in the United States. This staggering statistic needs to change. The elderly should not have to wonder where their next meal comes from and deserve security. My grandfather understood this and strived to provide that feeling of safety and security to others.

For those interested in volunteering at a food pantry in their area, please visit the site nyc.gov/site/dycd/services/food_pantries.page for more information.



Photo Credit: <https://www.meforweproject.com/>

AAP Guidelines on Treating Childhood Obesity: Aggressive or Proactive?

By: Alison Garbarini

This January, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) released updated clinical practice guidelines on the evaluation and treatment of obesity in children and adolescents (1). The 100-page document advises on appropriate treatment methods for overweight and obesity in children aged 2 and older (2).

The guidelines begin with an overview of the complexity of obesity, including a comprehensive section on risk factors. The authors emphasize that the development of obesity is influenced by socioeconomic, genetic, physiologic and environmental factors (2). In addition, the AAP recommends taking a “whole-child approach” in the treatment of obesity. This calls for pediatricians to use supportive, non-stigmatizing language with patients in order to focus the conversation on overall health rather than weight (3,4).

Through this stance, the AAP attempts to debunk outdated ideas about the causes of obesity and improve doctors’ approaches towards treatment. This is important because individuals with obesity continuously face weight bias and stigma, due to the public impression that personal lifestyle choices are the main cause of this chronic disease. This implicit bias also exists amongst medical professionals, sometimes causing them to overlook health problems that are unrelated to obesity (5, 6). Therefore, including an acknowledgement of these issues in the guidelines was imperative.

Due to the rise of childhood obesity, the AAP encourages providers to more proactively evaluate children for this condition. Studies have shown that obesity increases the risk for cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, poor mental health, and many other health issues. Therefore, the AAP emphasized that it is now essential to treat children with obesity as early as possible, rather than waiting to see if they will “outgrow” this chronic disease (3).

While the most accurate measure of body composition is dual-energy x-ray absorptiometry, this instrument is expensive and impractical for usage in

clinical practice (2). Therefore, due to affordability and ease of use, BMI is the recommended screening and diagnosis tool for overweight and obesity (2). The AAP recommends that pediatricians evaluate children annually using BMI percentiles from age and sex-specific CDC growth charts. In children, a BMI of >95th percentile indicates obesity, while a BMI between the 85th percentile and 95th percentile is classified as overweight. Severe obesity is defined as a BMI of >120% of the 95th percentile for a child’s age and sex (2).

The AAP’s treatment recommendations are backed by years of scientific studies. They advise pediatricians to proactively screen children with obesity for comorbidities such as abnormalities in lipids, glucose metabolism and liver function. For children with overweight, the guidelines also suggest screening for lipid abnormalities. In addition, if these children present risk factors for Type 2 Diabetes or Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease, they may also be screened for abnormal glucose metabolism and liver function. For both children with overweight and obesity, the AAP recommends evaluating hypertension risk beginning at age 3, by measuring their blood pressure at every doctor’s visit. If any comorbidities are found to exist, it is recommended that these are treated concurrently with overweight or obesity (2).

Though these measures are proactive, they lead one to wonder why the AAP is not recommending a blood panel screening for all children. It is well-known that BMI can be influenced by many variables, including muscle mass. In addition, it is possible for children with a BMI in the “healthy” range to be metabolically unhealthy. Therefore, to further eliminate weight bias and promote preventative health measures, it may be best to do these screenings for all children.

The most significant changes in these updated guidelines were related to intensive lifestyle treatment, pharmacotherapy, and bariatric surgery. Some of these recommendations have proved to be controversial amongst pediatricians, public health professionals, and eating disorder specialists.

AAP Guidelines on Treating Childhood Obesity: *Continued*

According to the new guidelines, doctors may recommend that children aged 2 or older with overweight and obesity attend “intensive health behavior and lifestyle treatment” (IHBLT). This individualized weight-management intervention involves the child and their family regularly attending visits with healthcare professionals to develop healthy eating and exercise habits. According to Sandra Hassink, director of the AAP's Institute for Healthy Childhood Weight, IHBLT is an effective and evidence-based approach to treating obesity (7). The AAP states that, “the most effective treatment includes 26 or more hours of face-to-face, family-based, multicomponent treatment over a 3- to 12-mo period” (2).

While effective, IHBLT may require a significant input of time and resources from a child and their family. In addition, the AAP states that the availability of IHBLT and similar treatments is “generally poor,” and recommends that families should be connected to a variety of community resources if such a program is not accessible (2). Even if IHBLT is accessible, many insurance companies will not cover this type of treatment (4). Therefore, the AAP advocates for policy changes to support the use of IHBLT.

If done correctly, the expansion of IHBLT services could help to elevate the dietetics profession. According to the AAP, “RDNs can complement the care of medical providers and may be the most widely available specialist with whom pediatricians and other PHCPs can work to provide more intensive behavioral intervention” (2). In addition to increasing the demand for RDNs and promoting job growth, increasing access to IHBLT could help raise awareness of the challenges of navigating our food supply. It may also help the healthcare system to further realize the value of behavioral interventions.

There is also emerging evidence that medication and bariatric surgery may be beneficial treatment modalities when utilized in conjunction with IHBLT (7). The AAP recommends that children 12 and older with obesity should be offered weight loss medication as another tool for weight management. The guidelines also indicate that children with severe obesity who are at least 13 years old should be offered a referral for evaluation for metabolic or bariatric surgery. However, these methods should always occur alongside IHBLT (2,6).

While the AAP supports children’s access to weight-loss medication and bariatric surgery as an adjunct to IHBLT, some professionals feel that these recommendations are too extreme. Many eating disorder specialists are rightfully concerned that placing a negative emphasis on a child’s weight will lead to disordered eating (4, 8). The AAP recommends that children be evaluated for eating disorders before and during obesity treatment. They also state that interventions like IHBLT actually make children less likely to develop disordered eating, in comparison to a child’s self-guided dieting. Therefore, it is essential to increase access to IHBLT. Without the guidance of the most effective recommended treatment option, the AAP guidelines may leave children with the notion that something about their body is wrong.

Overall, the new AAP guidelines provide a thorough overview of obesity treatment research, while acknowledging stigma and weight bias. However, we must consider the system and policy changes needed to support the implementation of these recommendations, as well as how to minimize the burden on families and children.

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Interview with Dr. Jen Cadenhead and Stephanie Loui: What's New at the Tisch Food Center?

By: Alison Garbarini & Thu Thu May Oo

The following interview has been edited and condensed.

In New York State there are about 2.5 million school students. While many of these students receive free school lunch, as of now there are still 726,000 children who lack access to free nutritious meals. Earlier this year, more than 200 representatives from all parts of New York converged in Albany to rally for Healthy School Meals for All. This act would guarantee free meals for all New York school students.

Dr. Jen Cadenhead, the Executive Director of the Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy, participated in this rally. We had the privilege to interview Dr. Cadenhead along with Stephanie Loui, Food Ed Program Specialist. They provided much insight on the Healthy School Meals for All Coalition, recent Tisch Food Center projects, and opportunities for student involvement in this field.



Tell us about your work with the Healthy School Meals for All coalition.

JC: When the pandemic hit, the USDA provided waivers which allowed all schools participating in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program to offer free meals. These waivers expired in August 2022. With this in mind, Congress was trying to incorporate Healthy Free School Meals for All (HFSM₄A) into the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act. However, this legislation faced significant pushback, which ultimately prevented it from passing universal free school meals.

In anticipation of this, we created a coalition during the 2021-22 school year to understand the barriers for authorizing free school meals on a state-by-state basis. While HFSM₄A were not passed nation-wide, several states went forward with passing this on a state-level. We were a part of the group that helped to advise these states on the most effective methods of passing this legislation.

Can you share with us about the [Wellness in the Schools \(WITS\)](#) scratch-cooking initiative in NYC schools?

JC: In New York City, close to 80% of the children are eligible for free or reduced meals. Because of this, NYC was able to adapt HFSM₄A through the Community Eligibility Provision. Therefore, any NYC student who chooses to eat a school meal can eat it for free. Despite that, the average student participation is only about 60% at lunch and 30% at breakfast. This is comparable to national trends. However, when compared to the subset of schools offering HFSM₄A, it's actually a bit lower than average.

We know that school meals are the healthiest meals eaten by Americans. They are required to adhere to the nutrition standards of the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. However, you need children to be interested in eating the meals, and they tend to care about the flavor of foods, which is tough when you have a palate based largely on tasty, but unhealthy snacks that are usually ultra-processed foods. By offering more scratch-cooked foods through WITS, we're hoping students will expand their palates and increase their participation in school lunch.

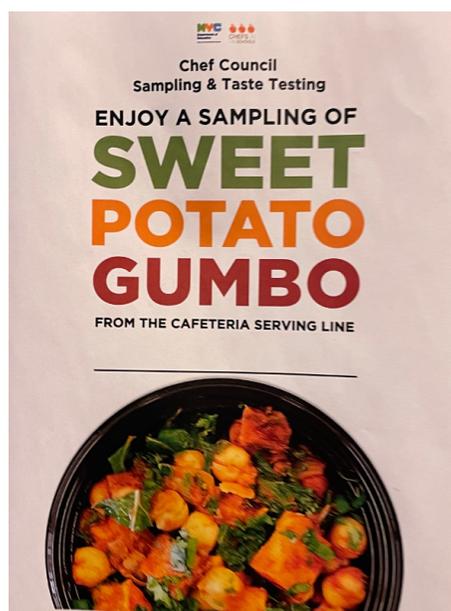


Photo Credit: Dr. Jen Cadenhead

What's New at the Tisch Food Center?: *Continued*

February 17, 2023 was the first day that all New York City public schools experimented with one of the recipes from the WITS partnership with the [Chefs Council](#). The Chefs Council is a group of 12 chefs, picked to represent the diversity of cooking styles and ethnic variation within NYC, headed by Rachael Ray. They came up with a series of recipes for NYC school lunches and are currently testing around eight of them. Their menus are plant-based, scratch-cooked, and culturally responsive. The first new recipe introduced was a sweet potato gumbo, made from chickpeas, sweet potatoes and greens. It was beautifully presented at PS75, the school I visited.

I believe if these meals come with food and nutrition education (which is something that has been years in the making) they can work to help change students' palates and increase school lunch participation rates. The plan is that more and more of the Chef Council's recipes will appear on the menus during the 2023–24 school year and there will be training on scratch cooking for all kitchen staff over the next two school years. There are also plans for some schools to receive more food and nutrition education. The Tisch Food Center is working closely with the Office of Food and Nutrition Services and WITS staff on these plans and will conduct an evaluation of what is working, what is not, and also be measuring how much of these new recipes students are eating.



Photo Credit: Dr. Jen Cadenhead

What goes into advocacy at the local and state level?

JC: First, you must bring together a group of people who are passionate about the issues, understand the implications, and dedicated to supporting the cause. It is essential to gather a core group of people who will stand with you for a long-term push for change. While some things may seem like an overnight success, such as the Food Ed Hub, these are really the result of many years of advocacy. Food and nutrition education began in the early 1900s at Teachers College with Mary Swartz Rose. Innumerable organizations and individuals have pushed to get nutrition education included as a separate subject in New York City schools. This effort alone is the culmination of 40 years of advocacy. Many changes that you see on a state level are also the result of years of advocacy work.

Advocacy initiatives are successful when lots of people are telling policymakers the benefits of the policy change. When universal free meals were passed in NYC, many people were involved in addition to families. For example, these included: community groups, pediatricians, parents, the principals' union, the teachers' union, the cafeteria workers' union, and the bus drivers' union. When you bring people together, politicians are willing to act.

What rewarding experiences have you encountered in your work?

JC: What keeps me going is recognizing the impact that the advocating we do at the Tisch Food Center can have. While in Albany this January, I heard a foster child share his story. His foster parents didn't recognize that he was eligible for free school meals, so he would go hungry many days. He was involved in athletics, and at some point, his coaches took him aside and asked, 'why are you hungry?' After looking into it, they realized that because he is a foster child, he is eligible for free meals. Stories like this show me that there are many children and families who need people to advocate for them. Our research helps to get those stories told, so that people can live better lives.

What advice do you have for students interested in getting involved in this field?

JC: A good start would be volunteering at a food pantry. Especially client choice pantries or those that provide services for people, like [POTS \(Part of the Solution\)](#) or Westside Coalition Against Hunger. They do a really good job of helping empower people.

Is there anything else that you would like to share with us?

JC: The TC education is really empowering. Students may not recognize how much they know, but they should trust in the knowledge they're getting and feel confident to learn and grow. Follow your passion, but learn and grow in areas outside of TC to give back, because the world really needs you.

Can you tell us about the initiatives going on at the [Food Ed Hub](#)?

SL: We focus on community partnerships, professional development and nutrition education. We partner with about 40 organizations that



conduct food and nutrition education programming in NYC schools. This spans from culinary, to working with garden and urban farms, to connecting food and nutrition to various academic subjects, to promoting food justice. This helps students have stronger food literacy and greater

enjoyment of healthy food. We also hold a monthly coalition meeting, which is an opportunity for stakeholders to get together. Some will work more on the policy side, drafting documents to share with politicians about the needs, values and goals of Food Ed in New York City. We also have a special interest group focused on equity and outreach. That includes doing workshops and events for the coalition and the public, making sure that we are trying to reach as many different boroughs and areas as possible.

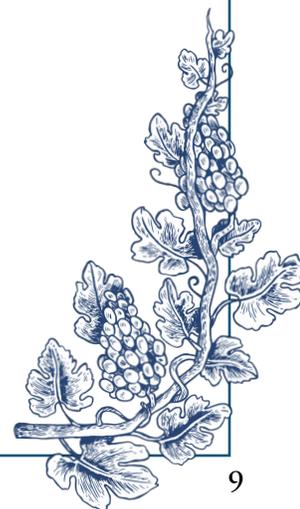
Historically, we have done a Food Ed Hub award to uplift and highlight food champions in the Food and Nutrition Education space. We also find ways to highlight our partners. We have a monthly blog series spotlighting a particular organization, what they do,

some of the lessons they use in their teaching, and how we can support them as a community.

Finally, the [Wellness Program Finder](#) is a really important part of the work of the Tisch Food Center. This tool provides a way to search programs based on specific health education needs. If a school or a teacher wants to look up a particular kind of Nutrition, Physical Fitness, Sustainability or Environmental Ed, they can use the wellness program finder. This partner-project is exciting because it banks everything in a living library, with access to resources, curricula, and other information.

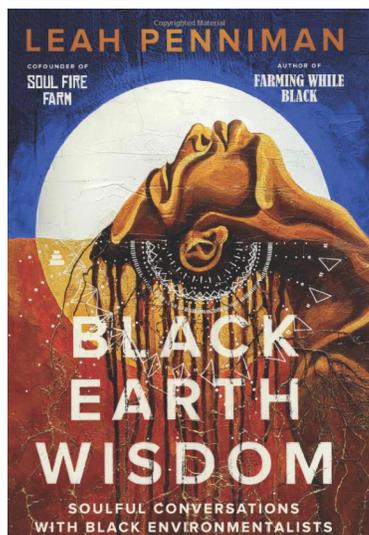
Join The Food Ed Hub at its first ever Conference: Friday, June 9th 2023 from 9am-4pm at Teachers College! Topics will include: nutrition education, youth food justice, culinary ed, school wellness, and much more. Educators, advocates, and organizations across NYC will join together for this event celebrating community food heroes, emerging nutrition research, and delicious culinary demonstrations. Learn more [here](#).

Photos of Dr. Cadenhead & Stephanie Loui courtesy of Tisch Center website: <https://www.tc.columbia.edu/tisch/about/>



Black Earth Wisdom: Soulful Conversations with Black Environmentalists by Leah Penniman (Book & Event Review)

By: Thu Thu May Oo



Picture 1: "Listening to the Earth" art by Naima Penniman

On March 18, 2023, I had a privilege to attend the event, *Skin the Color of Soil: Black Earth Wisdom with Leah Penniman*, organized by the Museum of Food and Drink. Leah is a cofounder of [Soul Fire Farm](#), an Afro-Indigenous-centered community farm dedicated to uprooting racism and seeding sovereignty in the food system through farmer training and feeding the communities. She is also an author of *Farming While Black* and a recipient of the James Beard Leadership Award. I first heard about *Soul Fire Farm* and Leah in our Nutritional Ecology course taught by Drs. Koch and Gussow. Since then, I have been awe-inspired by Leah's spiritual-being and her food justice movement to cultivate food sovereignty and empowerment for BIPOC youths. During the event, Leah Penniman and Onika Abraham, Director of [Farm School NYC](#), discussed how farming and living in deep connection with land could heal and fortify our planet and

ourselves and how we can get involved regardless of where we live - urban or rural. From fruitful and spiritually uplifting conversations to spoken word poetry, the event provided a space for me to slow down and reflect. I felt nourished and nurtured by the people and the energy around me.

Similarly, her book, *Black Earth Wisdom*, encompasses a compilation of insightful essays and conversations that explore Black people's soulful and scientific connection to nature and our ecosystem. Some of the scientists, environmentalists, and community leaders Leah spoke with include - adrienne maree brown, author of *Emergent Strategy*; Dr. Ayana Elizabeth Johnson, marine biologist and founder of Ocean Collectiv; and Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award-winning author Alice Walker. As Leah described, "*Black Earth Wisdom* is a conversation between African diasporic people who are carrying on our ancient ancestral practice of listening to the earth to know which way to go," the book encapsulates and revitalizes the ecological humility and the intrinsic connection to the land, waters, and climate of Black cultural heritage which have been diminished due to the dehumanization and exploitation of colonization and racial capitalism past and present. The conversations also examine the disruption of the food system we have encountered during the Covid-19 pandemic. The interviews and conversations also illustrate sociocultural dimensions of our relationship to ecosystems

as Dr. Ayana Elizabeth Johnson discussed, "It is important to understand that fishing is also a social and racial justice issue. We need to look at who has access to the coastline and the fisheries, whose waters are getting polluted, and who bear the disproportionate burden of sea level rise and hurricanes. Communities of color and poor communities are impacted first and worst."

As I am living through a series of political upheavals happening in my home country, Myanmar (Burma), which have continued to fill our lives with grief and disarray, I feel as though I have lost my cultural and spiritual well-being and identity. Furthermore, with limited access to the spiritual practices and teachings of my ancestors here in the United States, which has created a deep sense of disconnect within me, I am constantly searching for a way to bridge the gap between my past and my present but can't seem to find it. In a moment like this, Leah's wisdom and that of many Black environmental and thought-provoking community leaders have helped me find solace as I share the collective healing and nurturing space with my fellow BIPOC community, where we center love and communal care as we pave the path towards equitable food systems. As Leah Penniman described, "We must claim our connections with nature and remember how to reverently attune and respond to the land, rather than extract and commodify."

A Reflection on Southeast Asia's Palm Oil Trade: Are strict deforestation regulations really what we need?

By Wency Xiang

I remember back in middle school when I took a geography class, there was a discussion led by the teacher about the problems associated with palm oil productions in Southeast Asia. The focus was on the conflict between the economic aspirations of people in developing countries and the criticism directed towards the palm oil industry due to its environmental impacts. It is surprising to realize that even after ten years, we are still grappling with this issue. Having extensively explored the impact of the global food supply chain on our climate and environment in Nutritional Ecology class at TC, I am eager to delve deeper into the complexities of palm oil problems from various perspectives.



Picture 1: Local families sit beneath the tent in an oil palm plantation in Indonesia, Photo Credit: Pailin Wedel for Human Rights Watch

Palm oil production is a major contributor to deforestation in Southeast Asia (1). Deforestation has resulted in the loss of biodiversity and cultural diversity as it threatens valuable wildlife with extinction, including: orangutans, Borneo elephants, and Sumatran tigers (1,2). It also poses a threat to the health and livelihood of many local communities. With the loss of

access to traditional farmlands and natural food sources, Indigenous populations must rely on more readily available, processed foods (3). This reliance has resulted in a higher intake of added sugar and sodium, contributing to an increased risk of nutrition-related chronic illnesses among local and indigenous communities.

It's undeniable that deforestation is a major global issue. Worldwide, about 19 million hectares of land (an area greater than the size of Syria) are occupied by palm oil plantations which produce 81 million tons of palm oil annually (4). 45% of these plantations are on the lands that were previously covered by dense rain forests (5). Given the devastating effects of deforestation associated with palm oil plantations, policies that can effectively decrease deforestation for palm oil plantations are urgently needed.

Would finding a replacement for palm oil be a viable approach for both consumers and the food industry? Palm oil is the world's most popular vegetable oil, used in numerous foods, cosmetics, detergents, and biofuels (2). In fact, it is known for being among the most efficient methods of plant-based oil production, yielding more oil than soybean and sunflower equivalents (6). Thanks to this characteristic, market domination was mainly rooted in the lower price, resulting in the production scale being more extensive than its equivalents.

The European Parliament and the Council of the European Union

(EU) finalized their negotiations on the Deforestation-Free Supply Chain Regulation in December 2022 (7,8,9). Parliament adopted this regulation in April, and Council followed suit, adopting the regulation on May 16th, 2023. This means it will now be published in the EU's Official Journal, and commence 20 days after (10). They perceive this provision would decrease the import of palm oil from deforested areas to decrease deforestation.



Picture 2: Tropical forests cleared for monoculture palm oil plantations, Photo Credit: World Wildlife Fund

The EU is responsible for approximately 10% of global deforestation (11). While this policy alone may not be enough to address the issue on a global scale, it sets a precedent. Other regions could decide to also adopt this type of policy, or not. The new regulations will be beneficial for EU consumers, who can now purchase products with the assurance that they are not contributing to deforestation. However, the situation is more complex for the producers across the globe. This regulation has been met with much dissent from some countries that are a part of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) on palm oil export.

Note: Per the Deforestation-Free Supply Chain Regulation, 'deforestation-free' refers to the land that has not been subject to deforestation after December 31, 2020.

Two countries leading the dissent are Malaysia and Indonesia, which are the top two palm-oil producers (12). Despite this push-back, the EU is firm on this provision stating that environmental protection and the containment of climate change are of top priority. While decreasing deforestation is a huge step forward for environmental protection, there must be greater amplification of the environmental and health concerns expressed by Indigenous communities, smaller farmers, and consumers.



Picture 3: Bunches of oil palm seeds harvested by farm workers, Photo Credit: World Wildlife Fund

First, smaller farmers are an essential component of supply chains. While one may assume that large companies and multinationals would be the most resistant to the EU's deforestation regulations (due to their large-scale production), it is actually smaller farmers who are resisting since new rules and regulations would greatly increase their costs. The EU urges the producers to comply with obligatory due diligence which means all palm oil needs to be labeled with the country where it was produced and verified as 'deforestation-free'. If they fail to do so, their products will not be accepted by the European market (7,8,9,11). This brings a significant issue for many smaller farmers because they do not have the resources to have their products verified as deforestation free,

particularly as they moved through the supply chain from farm all the way to the European market. This is a requirement for selling in premium markets (7,8,9,11). Over 7 million small-scale farmers around the world earn their livelihood by growing palm oil. Also, in Indonesia and Malaysia, 40% of the palm oil cultivation is owned by smaller farmers (12). Thus, smaller farmers are likely to be impacted more than large corporations by the Deforestation-Free Supply Chain Regulation.. This is a negative unintended consequence of this new policy.

Second, the demand for palm oil has surged since the Russia-Ukraine war, as these two countries are the world's biggest producers of sunflower oil, an alternative to palm oil. Due to this geopolitical instability and conflict, the EU is currently experiencing a shortage of sunflower oil (1). Thus comes the question whether the EU is adequately prepared to help both consumers and the food industry to transition to less reliance on palm oil.

Third, this regulation may not have the desired decrease in deforestation. This is because if the EU has regulations that are much stricter than those in most other nations, it could lead to what is termed a "leakage problem." From an environmental perspective, a leakage problem is when efforts aimed at mitigating environmental impacts in one place are successful on a local level, but exacerbate the impacts in other regions (13). As a result, the strict EU regulations could result in a decrease in palm oil imports to Europe. However, these products might be redirected to other countries that have less stringent import regulations (11). Brazil's

2006 Soy Moratorium (SoyM) serves as a prime example of the consequences of such leakage problems relating to deforestation (14). While this agreement resulted in a sharp drop in Amazon deforestation in two years, it unintentionally influenced more deforestation further south, in the Cerrado region (14). What may be needed is more efficient ways to halt deforestation on a large, global scale while also helping smaller farmers and communities as they transition.

Fourth, the EU's Deforestation-Free Supply Chain Regulation assigns responsibility for environmental damage in the countries in the Global South. While it is accurate that corruption in governments has played a significant role in deforestation, particularly in Indonesia where forest clearance has been widespread and oil palm plantations have grown with government assistance, it is crucial to hold wealthy nations responsible for their actions (14). Thus, we must not disregard the accountability of the richest nations in deforestation.

The ASEAN's exploitation of natural resources without consideration of environmental effects has been normalized as a consequence of a hypocritical attitude by the developed economies, where they belittle the connection between global supply chain demand and deforestation in ASEAN and urge these developing nations to preserve the region. Furthermore, the mandatory requirements of adding palm oil into motor fuels since 2009 is also a contributor to large-scale palm oil production and deforestation. Unfortunately, the effects of this are rarely acknowledged (1).



Picture 4: Harvested oil palm seeds in Indonesia , Photo Credit: Pailin Wedel for Human Rights Watch

As a result, no one can completely disassociate themselves from responsibility for deforestation. All of us, including those who attempt to shirk off blame, are complicit in exploiting these resources. That being said, an individual's contribution, no matter how small, could have long-lasting effects in protecting our planet. Any attempts to slow down deforestation should be appreciated, especially the initial endeavor, which carries much risk since there is no prior experience to reference. It is rational to carry out trials to assess the feasibility of proposed plans; they can give a solid foundation for more sophisticated approaches. Nonetheless, all attempts must adhere to the same basic principle: we must honor the rights of those without political power or those in disadvantaged positions to achieve the ambitious aim of safeguarding our global climate.

The experience of indigenous communities in ASEAN reminds me of the hardships faced by minoritized communities in the United States. While the causes may differ, there is a similar pattern of systemic discrimination and neglect to promote profitable agribusinesses. These structural political disadvantages contribute to poor health outcomes in many disenfranchised communities in both Global North and Global South. We must pave the path to ecological sustainability and an equitable agricultural system by raising awareness and advocating for environmental justice-centered policy changes. I am certain the road ahead is still long, and it is imperative to remain persistent.

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Fuel for the Future: Plant-based Inpatient Meals

By: Jerianne Cusipag

The theme of this year's National Nutrition Month (which was in March) is "Fuel for the Future," which emphasizes eating sustainably while maintaining our health (1). Historically, New York City has been at the forefront of food justice movements, through its initiation of countless policies and programs aimed at improving nutrition, promoting food security, and creating a more sustainable food system. Between 2008 and 2017, the City implemented policies such as limiting sugary drinks in childcare centers (2007), banning trans-fats in NYC restaurants (2008), and establishing the NYC Food Standards (2008), the Health Bucks Program (2005), and universal free school lunches in NYC middle schools (2015) (2).

In February 2021, Mayor Eric Adams issued New York City's first 10-year food policy plan, which aims to provide New York City with an equitable, sustainable, and healthy food system by 2031 (3). In line with this policy, the administration is reimagining how New Yorkers can access healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate food. The City provides meals to different populations (i.e. children through school meals, the homeless through the shelters, the elderly through the senior care centers, and patients through the hospitals). The state ensures that all New Yorkers can access plant-forward and nutritious food by improving these meals (3). This January 2023, NYC Health + Hospitals announced that they would now serve plant-based meals as a default lunch and dinner for inpatients in 11 hospitals (4,5). The program initially began in March 2022, when they first served plant-based lunches as the primary option for patients (4,5).

The menu at NYC Health + Hospitals was carefully designed to include plant-based options that catered to the diverse cultures of the hospital's population. The hospital's website lists a variety of meals such as Sancocho with Rice, Chipotle Vegetable Taco with Corn Tortilla, Yellow Rice, Black Beans, Plant Based Cheese and Salsa, Pad Thai Noodle Bowl, Spanish Vegetable Paella With Yellow Rice, Falafel with Harissa Sauce, Whole Wheat Pita and Roasted Eggplant, and Red Curry Vegetables with Roasted Tofu. Patients are assisted by Food Service Associates (FSA) in selecting their meals, and the FSAs also deliver food trays to them. In case patients need

further information or nutrition counseling, they can consult with registered dietitians (6).



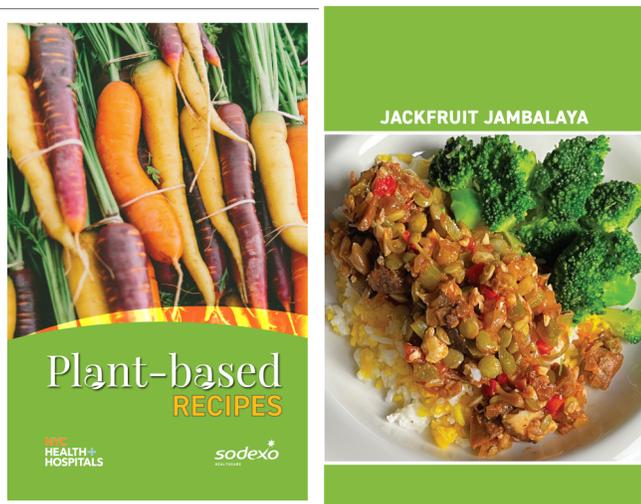
Picture 1: Patient eating meal, Photo credit: [www.Canva.com](https://www.canva.com)

Aside from sustainability, well-planned plant-based diets are nutritionally adequate and can prevent and treat chronic diseases. For instance, according to Adventist Health Study 2 which evaluated the association between vegetarian dietary patterns and mortality, the prospective cohort study found that there was a 13% decreased risk of developing cardiovascular disease and a 19% decreased risk of ischemic heart disease among vegetarians compared to non-vegetarians (7). In addition, vegan, vegetarian, lacto-ovo vegetarian, and semi-vegetarian diets were associated with reduced risk of diabetes when compared to non-vegetarian diets (7). Improving patient health through plant-based meals can have a potentially positive impact on hospital finances as well.

In 2018, the University of Florida successfully implemented plant-based options for its inpatients. Plant-based diet orders were incorporated into patients' admission orders to stimulate conversations about diet between physicians and patients. Overall, patients were satisfied with the hospital's plant-based meals (8). While plant-based meals were initially more expensive than meals from the hospital's traditional cardiac menu, this was offset by a decrease in healthcare costs from improved patient outcomes (8). However, it is also important to consider that patients' nutritional needs during hospitalization may differ due to the catabolic nature of diseases (9).

Fuel for the Future: *Continued*

Nutrition needs, especially protein, are increased when a patient is in a catabolic state (9). In some illnesses, such as cancer, this is coupled with altered taste and smell, leading to loss of appetite (9). Malnutrition in hospitalized patients is a serious concern and dietitians should be vigilant in assessing their patients' risk of malnutrition (9).



Picture 3 and 4: *Plant-based Recipes Booklet and Meals Offered at NYC Health+ Hospitals/ NYC Health+Hospitals, Photo credit: <https://www.nychealthandhospitals.org/services/patient-meals/>*

Often, dietitians face challenging situations with their hospitalized patients. How do I help my patient achieve positive health outcomes considering their disease and nutrition needs, culture, and eating patterns? How do I counsel them to eat healthily while being mindful of what they are going through and what they feel? Plant-based meals are an excellent opportunity to educate patients on the benefits of a plant-forward lifestyle. However, a default plant-based inpatient meal is excessive. Meat is included in most of the cultures that we have studied during the Ethnic Foods Practicum. Animal protein is also more efficiently digested than plant proteins. Research is needed to better understand the acceptability of these plant-based meals from the patient's perspectives as well as the dietitians that serve them. Nevertheless, hospital menus should still provide vegetarian and vegan options. These options help reduce food waste, increase patient satisfaction, and promote positive health outcomes. With climate change already affecting food production and food security, adopting a sustainable diet is a potential solution to mitigate its impacts. As (future) dietitians,

we are all inexplicably linked to healthful lifestyle and ecological sustainability.

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The Nova Food Classification System: Rationale, Description, and Applications by Dr. Carlos Monteiro (Conference Review)

By: Thu Thu May Oo



Picture 1: Dr. Monteiro seen here with the TC's Nutrition Program on April 6, 2023, Photo credit: Thu Thu May Oo

During this spring semester, I had the privilege to attend the talk by Dr. Carlos Monteiro, "The Nova Food Classification System: Rationale, Description, and Applications," hosted by our TC's Program in Nutrition and coordinated by doctoral student, Adriana Carrieri, who studied with Dr. Monteiro when she was in Brazil. Dr. Carlos Monteiro is a Nutrition and Public Health Professor at the University of Sao Paulo, Brazil, and Head of the University's Centre for Epidemiological Studies in Health and Nutrition. His research interests lie in populations' nutritional and food intake, biological and socioeconomic determinants of nutritional deficiencies and obesity and other nutrition-related chronic diseases, food processing in the food system and human health, and evaluation of food and nutrition programs and policies.

In fact, Dr. Monteiro and his team at the University of Sao Paulo developed the Nova food classification system and gave the world a tool to define and study the link between ultra-processed food intake and various health outcomes. With the surge in packaged meals, ready-to-eat, and fast food in the modern food system, Dr. Monteiro and his team noticed the displacement of long-established dietary patterns that included minimally processed foods and freshly prepared meals (1). Instead, the dietary pattern started moving toward relying upon packaged meals and ultra-processed food. Nova classification comprises four groups: unprocessed or minimally processed foods, processed culinary ingredients, processed foods, and ultra-processed foods (1).

During the conference, Dr. Monteiro addressed the following:

1. The rationale for a health-oriented food classification based on food processing → for e.g., how the contents of critical nutrients in foods (and diets) today are driven by food processing.
2. The description of Nova → four groups of food; for e.g., ultra-processed food is created with the intention to please palatability and profits.
3. The uses and applications → Meta-analyses and systematic reviews of different research articles published on ultra-processed food, Nova, and the association between various chronic illnesses and the consumption of ultra-processed food.
4. The development and improvement → different implications of Nova classification worldwide, for e.g., nutrition guidelines in Israel, Malaysia, and app, etc.



Picture 2: Dr. Monteiro seen here with Drs. Koch and Wolf during the Q&A session at the conference, Photo credit: Thu Thu May Oo

The Nova Food Classification System: *Continued*

Brazil (2014), Uruguay (2016), Ecuador (2018), Peru (2019), Israel (2019) and Malaysia (2020) national dietary guidelines use Nova as a framework for dietary recommendations



Picture 3: Dr. Monteiro's Slide Deck - Brazil (2014), Uruguay (2016), Ecuador (2018), Peru (2019), Israel (2019) and Malaysia (2020) national dietary guidelines use Nova as a framework for dietary recommendations

My takeaway - is that the view that a healthy diet comprises un/minimally processed foods and is restricted to highly processed food is now commonly accepted. Research also shows a surge in consumption of ultra-processed food in low, and middle-income countries as these food companies have started to direct their predatory marketing in these countries. Overall, the conference was very informative and inspiring. Dr. Monteiro raised critical awareness for me to think about how the dietary pattern in low or middle-income countries such as my home country, Myanmar, is leading to, and the importance of nutrition education and effective policy changes to combat the long-term impacts of globalization and ultra-processed food consumption.

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Black Earth Wisdom: *Continued*



Picture 2: Thu Thu seen here with Leab Penniman

Picture 3: Leab and Penniman (left) with Onika Abraham (right) during the event

Photo Credit: Thu Thu May Oo

Gado-Gado

A beloved Indonesian-inspired mixed vegetables dish with spicy peanut sauce

by Thu Thu May Oo

Gado-gado is my favorite dish for any time of the day, and it is a perfectly easy, and hearty dish for warm weather.

With its vibrant colors, this colorful Indonesia-inspired dish brightens up my dinner table after a long day of work. You can add any vegetables you have in your fridge.



Servings: 4

Total: 30 min

Prep: 10 min

Cook: 20 min

Ingredients:

Gado-gado

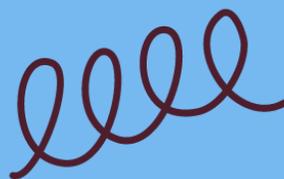
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 2 medium onions, diced
- 4 - 6 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- 2 cups protein of your choice
- 4 cups green beans, ends trimmed
- 2 bell peppers, chopped
- 2 cups carrots, chopped
- 1 - 2 cups bean sprout
- 1/3 cup sodium-reduced soy sauce
- black pepper
- 2 teaspoon sambal oelek or chili paste (I used Harissa, and it did wonders)

Peanut sauce:

- 1/2 cup peanut butter
- 1/3 cup water
- 1 - 2 cloves garlic
- 1 tablespoon sodium-reduced soy sauce
- 1/2 lime or lemon, juiced
- 1 teaspoon brown sugar

Instructions:

1. Add the oil, and sauté onion and garlic on high heat. Cook for 5 minutes.
2. Add the protein of your choice. Continue to cook until lightly golden, about 5 minutes. Then transfer to a bowl.
3. Add the green beans and carrots and a splash of water to the pan. Cover with a lid and cook at a gentle simmer for 7 minutes.
4. Add all the ingredients for the peanut sauce to a small food processor and blend until smooth. You can also mix them in a bowl.
5. Add the bell pepper and beansprout to the pan with green beans. Cover and cook for 5 more minutes. A bit of remaining water is fine, but drain any excess beyond 1- 2 Tbsp.
6. Add the cooked protein back into the pan, along with soy sauce, and sambal or chili paste. Cook until heated through.
7. Serve with rice, top with peanut sauce, and enjoy!



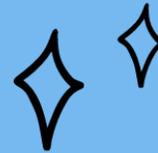
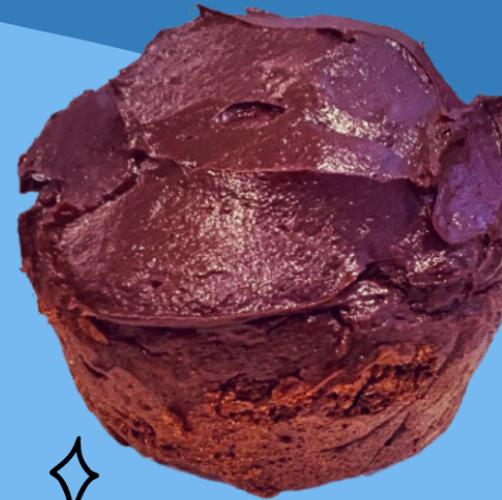
Cocoa-Licious Delight

A gluten-free and nutritious chocolate cake

by Sheba Bergman-Golden

As an MS-RDN Nutrition and Exercise Physiology student and as a mom of a kindergartener, I am aware that food allergies are increasing in their prevalence. When it comes to celebrating birthdays, I think it is important to be inclusive, especially with respect to food. As some of my child's classmates have peanut, tree nut, dairy, and gluten allergies (Celiac), I wanted to come up with a recipe for a classic chocolate cake that everybody could enjoy: Free of most allergens*, nutritious, and most importantly - taste amazing. So, after much experimentation and optimization, I came up with the recipe below.

This chocolate cake is made with buckwheat flour which is naturally gluten-free and appropriate for individuals with Celiac disease. It is also made with sweet potato in the cake base, which gives it a silky and moist texture while providing a good amount of fiber, and avocado in the frosting, which gives just the right texture and a good amount of healthy fats! When I tell people what is in this cake, they do not believe me...! This cake requires no special equipment, just a bowl, a fork, a bread loaf pan, and an oven.



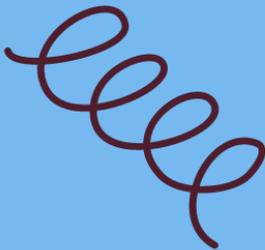
Ingredients:

Cake base:

- 1 medium size orange sweet potato, microwaved for 7-8 minutes (alternatively can be roasted in the oven for one hour), cooled, insides scooped out and mashed well with a fork
- 3 eggs*
- ¼ cup maple syrup*
- ¼ cup extra virgin coconut oil,* melted + extra for greasing the loaf pan
- ½ cup unsweetened rice milk*
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 cup buckwheat flour (e.g., Arrowhead Mills)
- ½ unsweetened cocoa powder (e.g., Navitas)
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon baking soda

Chocolate frosting:

- 1 ripe avocado, mashed with a fork
- ¼ cup unsweetened cocoa powder (e.g., Navitas)
- ¼ cup maple syrup



Instructions:

1. Pre-heat oven to 355 °F
2. Mix all the cake base wet ingredients in a large bowl – sweet potato, eggs, maple syrup, coconut oil, oat milk, and vanilla extract.
3. Add in the dry ingredients – buckwheat flour, cocoa powder, salt, and baking soda – and mix well.
4. Pour batter into a loaf pan greased with a bit of coconut oil.
5. Bake for 30 min and allow to cool down.
6. Meanwhile, prepare the frosting: Mix the avocado, cocoa powder, and maple syrup (you may use a blender to get an even smoother texture).
7. Spread the chocolate frosting on top of the cake.
8. The cake can be kept in the fridge covered with cling wrap for up to 4 days.

*Notes on substitutions:

- If you don't have a bread loaf pan, you can also bake this batter in a large 6-muffin mold without any modifications in baking time (the baking time would need to be shortened if it is a small 12-muffin mold).
- The eggs are necessary and cannot be substituted with flax eggs. Therefore, this recipe would not be appropriate for individuals with an egg allergy.
- I personally find that extra virgin coconut oil gives the best cake texture, but any neutral flavor vegetable oil – such as canola oil – will work for this recipe.
- If you are substituting honey for maple syrup, make sure you are using a relatively fluid honey – e.g., acacia flower honey. Thicker honey, such as Manuka, would not work well in this recipe, as the batter will be harder to mix with just a fork.
- Any milk would work in this recipe, so long as it is unsweetened, e.g., dairy, oat, hemp, almond, or coconut milk

