

## Correspondence

# Sustainable diet and cruciform ethics during COVID-19

### ABSTRACT

Health inequalities in food challenge sustainable prospects during the pandemic. Basic sustainable diet practices may address this issue, but problems of nutrition arise due to unhealthy eating habits. An inductive approach through curbing one's diet forms certain ethics, which takes into account one's sacrifices for the collective. This article proposes that cruciform ethics can introduce a reimagination of sustainable diets during coronavirus disease 2019.

**Keywords** sustainable diet, COVID-19, cruciform ethics, food security

A recent editorial of this journal asserts that the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic 'has caused a major impact on the health and wealth of nations and highlighted the stark impact of the consequences of inequality'.<sup>1</sup> The concept of health inequality can be implicitly directed to education<sup>2</sup> but directly to diet, especially sustainable diets—and this becomes crucial in health impact talks during the pandemic. 'Sustainable healthy diets' has been defined by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the World Health Organization (WHO) as, 'dietary patterns that promote all dimensions of individuals' health and wellbeing; have low environmental pressure and impact; are accessible, affordable, safe and equitable; and are culturally acceptable'.<sup>3</sup> Two vital problems engulfing the food issue on the crisis are the dominance of the food industry and the supermarket chains, which puts the 'local food producer at a disadvantage', and that 'it is not clear whether quarantine and social isolation have improved the population's standards of nutrition'.<sup>4</sup> For instance, the booming of delivery services for convenience food hampers preparing meals at home.

The United Nations Institute for Training and Research, The One UN Climate Change Learning Partnership, DANONE One Planet and One Health normatively stressed several key ideas to a sustainable diet. Basic considerations are to be careful not to over-indulge in meals, to be curious about the nutritional values of food, mindful in choosing what to shop or eat and to be frequent in home-cooking to know the food ingredients as opposed to eating outside. Moreover, one way to encourage better farming is to patronize the

local farmers' market and ask how the food was produced. Buying organic food not be about the price but the way it impacts the planet. Weighing social and environmental factors of food production can better account for the health and environmental benefits of promoting sustainable and regenerative farming. The panelists during the launching of the Global Food Security Index (GFSI) 2020 during last March 2021 also stress about sustainable farming methods. These basic inputs can provide traction against the health impact of the pandemic.

The hindrances to a sustainable diet, however, are unhealthy eating habits. Gluttony, for instance, must be mitigated by eating only what one can eat, stressing mindfulness and solidarity. Rating unhealthy lifestyles during the pandemic, conditions such as obesity have led to more chances of dying from COVID-19.<sup>5</sup> But immuno-depressed and malnourished people worldwide too are 'suffering disproportionately the lethal consequences of COVID-19'.<sup>6</sup> In the Philippine context, there is the existence of community pantries as 'emergency food', but such activities 'cannot be taken as a panacea, so that it is still imperative not only to attempt but enact the aim of global support and global solidarity'.<sup>7</sup> Even when they become integrated into institutions, such a level of sustainability as an ideal cannot be equated to food security, which is the access to 'sufficient, safe, and nutritious food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life'.<sup>8</sup>

A closer normative outlook here can focus on two fronts. At the collective level, one can set sustainable parameters to

harmonize the environmental, economic and social guidelines and to consider the culturally sensitive and context-specific approaches.<sup>9</sup> At the individual level, ‘we need innovations for system improvements and different interacting strategies to promote a “behavior change” toward health-promoting and sustainable diets’.<sup>10</sup> Finally, the changes in the environment in the Anthropocene<sup>11</sup> also impact food production and diet so that a ‘cruciform ethics’ that proposes to curtail one’s desires can provide a kenotic element in sustainability. Cruciform ethics asserts self-emptying habits, such as lessening the consumption of human societies that practice ‘a gluttony of excessive or wasteful eating, or energy profligacy’.<sup>12</sup> Food security can be achieved through inductive approaches, that is, from individuals who are willing to sacrifice certain affluence for the planet. This level of sustainability practice can become key but difficult to achieve. Dystopian social science films like ‘The Platform’ (2019) characterize the human hindrances to what it proposes to be its solution to food inequality—‘spontaneous solidarity’. In our context, this does not mean that one should altogether do away with one’s guilty pleasure food like cakes and other sweet delicacies. Curiosity about the nutritional value is a must in food intake. Reading the food labels means focusing on some important nutrients, such as fiber, sugar and salt. It is recommended that 50% of the diet should be fruits and vegetables since healthy and sustainable food can make up for a fit living. Educating oneself and others about the nutritious way to eat by changing habits for the planet makes choosing food more conscious. Such solidarity embodies cruciform ethics of sustainability, one in which diet can be reimagined during and post-COVID-19.

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