ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

British vegetable consumption

Sci. Total Environ. **682**, 80–105 (2019)

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Daily consumption of several servings of a variety of fruit and vegetables is essential for good health. Fresh, frozen, canned and pickled vegetables are all healthy options, but some choices are more sustainable than others. To determine sustainability, a life-cycle assessment considering growth, washing, processing, transportation, refrigeration and disposal can be performed to unearth the environmental impacts of various vegetable products.

Angelina Frankowska and colleagues from the University of Manchester, UK, assessed the life-cycle impacts of 21 vegetable types and 56 vegetable products consumed in the UK. The highest total impacts are from potatoes because they make up 56% of the total vegetables consumed, and they are commonly consumed as crisps and frozen chips.

By weight, asparagus generally has the highest impacts, especially because most asparagus is imported from Peru. Air-freighted fresh vegetables have five-times higher impacts compared to UK-grown produce. This level is higher than the impacts from processed vegetables, even after accounting for the production of glass jars and metal cans for packaging. However, vegetables driven from non-heated greenhouses in Europe have lower impacts than vegetables grown in heated greenhouses in the UK. Overall, cabbages, celery and Brussels sprouts are generally the most sustainably produced vegetables.

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