

Healthy Diets Are Too Expensive for Most Indians

Crop diversification and investments in rural infrastructure and markets are needed to make sustainable, nutritious diets affordable

Study Overview

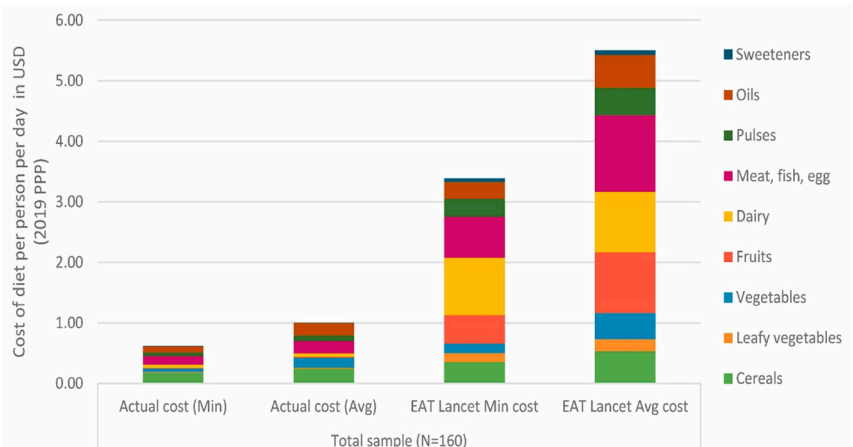
Using primary data on food prices and household purchases collected by TCI's Technical Assistance and Research for Indian Nutrition and Agriculture (TARINA) program, as well as secondary data on food expenditures from the Consumer Pyramids Household Survey, TCI researchers measured and compared the daily cost per person of the EAT-Lancet diet with the cost of the diet typically eaten in rural India.

Background

The EAT-Lancet diet purports to represent the least-expensive healthy nutritional regime possible in sustainable food systems. The diet is rich in micro-nutrient-rich foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts, and unsaturated oils. It includes moderate levels of seafood and poultry and very little red meat, refined grains, and added sugars.

RESULTS

There is a significant gap between current food consumption and the EAT-Lancet diet in India. The EAT-Lancet diet costs \$3-5 per person per day in rural India, depending on the season, while the average individual in rural India spends only \$1 per day on food. To satisfy the EAT-Lancet recommendations, an individual would have to spend \$1 more each day on each of three food groups: meat, fish, and poultry; dairy products; and fruit. Seasonality contributes to price volatility for fruit, green leafy vegetables, and other vegetables. This drives the cost of the EAT-Lancet diet as high as \$6 per day at certain times of the year, though the cost is generally lower.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Promote crop diversification to increase the availability and affordability of nutrition-rich foods.
- Invest in well-functioning markets and rural supply chain infrastructure.
- Increase demand for and consumption of nutritious foods through behavior change communication campaigns, women's empowerment, and food safety net programs like PDS.

Gupta, S., Vemireddy, V., Singh, D., and Pingali, P. Ground truthing the cost of achieving the EAT Lancet recommended diets: Evidence from rural India. *Global Food Security* Vol. 28 (March 2021). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gfs.2021.100498>.

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