

How COVID-19 reshaped environment-impacting consumer behaviour in Spain?

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Abstract

Understanding dynamic and complex interactions between consumer eating behaviors, environmental change and the COVID-19 pandemic is fundamental to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals and the Planetary Health Alliance. Spain has probably been one of the European countries where severe containment measures, such as social distancing, isolation and home confinement adopted by health authorities, has had a more severe impact on consumer behaviours. Within this framework, this study was carried out to assess the effects of COVID-19 health crisis on water-related and carbon-related implications of Spanish daily food consumption.

The life cycle assessment methodology was followed to account for the monitorization of the carbon footprint and the water footprint of the Spanish dietary pattern during and after COVID-19. The scope was bounded to the cradle-to-farm/factory gate. The functional unit selected was the average amount food purchased per person per day.

Results showed noticeable variations in the carbon footprint and water footprint associated to the Spanish dietary pattern throughout the years 2020 and 2021. The analysis revealed a major peak in both environmental indicators in March 2020-April 2020 due to higher household food consumption during lockdown months and restrictions of social distancing. Contrastingly, as the vaccination campaign advanced between December 2020 and August 2021, a downward trend in carbon and water footprint was observed.

These findings suggest that planetary health has been hampered due to the far-reaching impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Recovery from COVID-19 requires efforts in the development of nutritional policy standards to protect the health of both people and planet.

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