

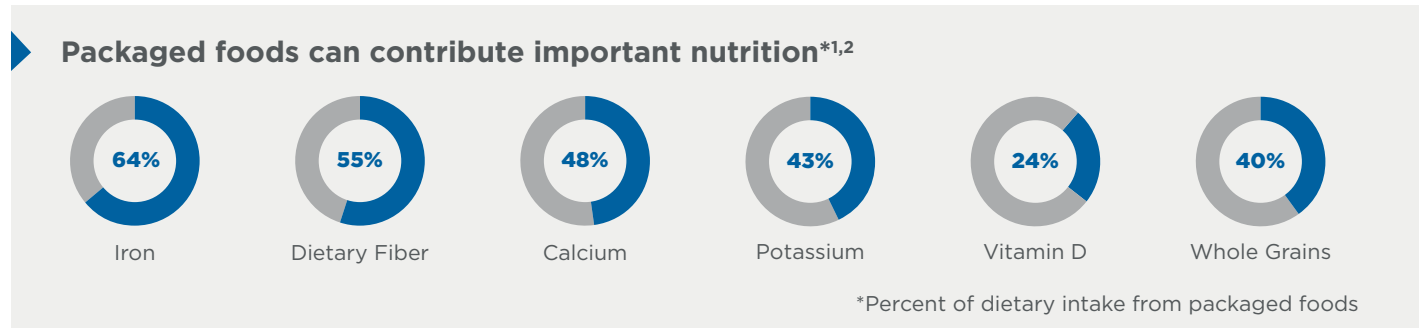


# HEALTHY, SUSTAINABLE DIETS: How Packaged Foods Fit



Given the urgency of the climate crisis and widespread food and nutrition insecurity, **there is a need to drive adoption of healthy, sustainable diets**. Despite significant global attention, there have been challenges aligning to recommendations that are affordable, achievable and scalable. Existing sustainable nutrition guidance focuses almost exclusively on whole foods. If packaged foods are discussed, they are often discouraged as “ultra-processed,” putting these diets even farther out of reach.

**While the foundation of a healthy, sustainable diet is whole foods, packaged foods can fit and help make eating in a nutritious and sustainable way the norm. Here’s why:**



**Packaged foods can provide environmental benefits**

- Offer extended shelf life<sup>3</sup>
- Reduce food waste<sup>4</sup>

**DID YOU KNOW?** Food waste is the largest contributor to landfill waste in the U.S. and a significant contributor to global GHG emissions<sup>4</sup>

**Packaged foods can support modern lifestyles<sup>5</sup>**

- Convenient, save time, and reduce meal planning stress
- Accessible to people with limited culinary skills or resources

**Packaged foods make up more than 50% of our diet<sup>6</sup> and can be an entry point for scaling broader adoption of healthy, sustainable diets.**

**Public health authorities acknowledge it is important to meet people where they are and encourage small, positive shifts.<sup>7,8,9</sup>**

**Small dietary changes can:**

- Be more achievable than switching to an entirely new diet<sup>10</sup>
- Encourage lasting dietary improvements<sup>7</sup>
- Result in reduced carbon and water footprints<sup>11,12</sup>

## While not all packaged foods are created equal — sustainable, nutritious packaged foods are easy to find if you know what to look for.

**Current evaluation approaches do not adequately inform choices aligned with healthy, sustainable diets and may have unintended consequences.** The NOVA system is commonly used, but evaluates foods based solely on degree of processing, which has significant limitations:

### **NOVA fails to account for nutrient density.**

Avoiding all foods considered “ultra-processed” eliminates many convenient, affordable, and nutritious options (i.e., flavored yogurt, whole grain cereals and bars).<sup>13</sup>

### **NOVA does not fully address sustainability.**

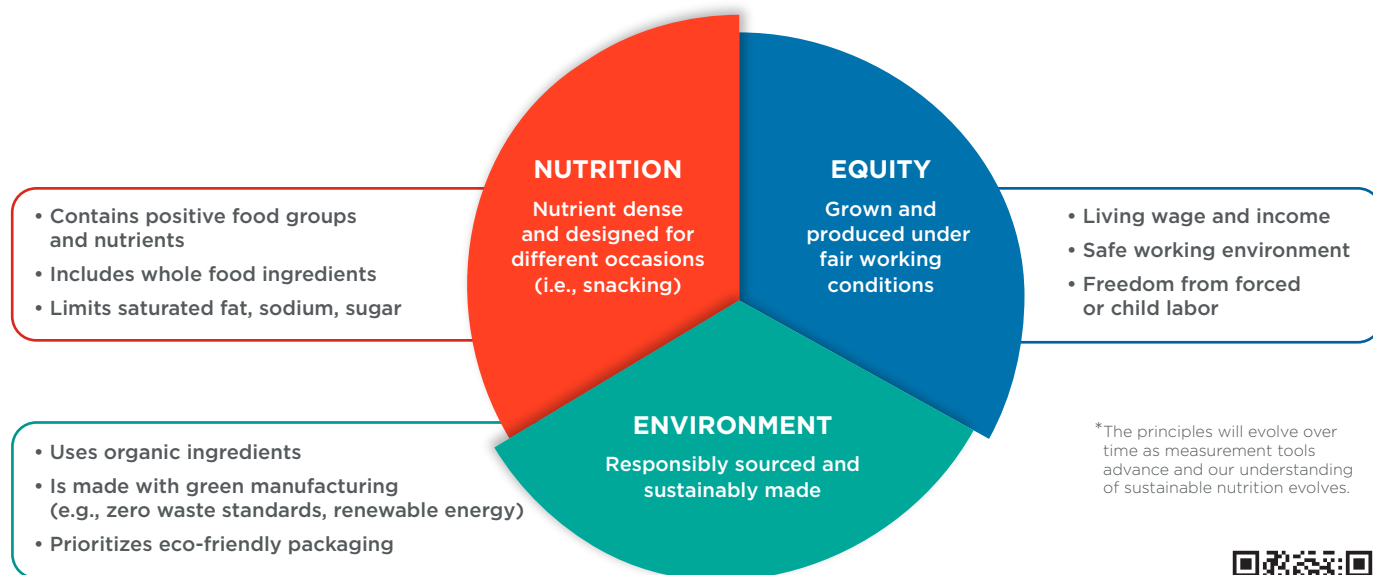
Existing evidence does not support an association between degree of food processing and environmental impact.<sup>14</sup>

## A new, more holistic evaluation system that considers the nutrition, environmental and equity aspects of packaged foods is needed.

A new *Current Developments in Nutrition* paper puts forward **the first of its kind definition of sustainable, nutritious packaged foods.**<sup>15</sup> Authored by renowned food systems and nutrition experts, this tool can help identify and recommend packaged foods that consider human, societal, and planetary health, as we collectively work to make healthy and sustainable eating accessible and achievable for all.

### A NOVEL TOOL FOR IDENTIFYING SUSTAINABLE, NUTRITIOUS PACKAGED FOODS

*Key Guiding Principles\**



Scan to read the full text article and review the complete guiding principles.



1. Weaver CM et al. Processed foods: contributions to nutrition. *Am J Clin Nutr.* 2014.
2. Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee. 2020. Scientific Report of the 2020 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee: Advisory Report to the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of Health and Human Services. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, Washington, DC.
3. Knorr D, Augustin MA. Food processing needs, advantages and misconceptions. *Trends Food Sci Technol.* 2021.
4. From Farm to Kitchen: The Environmental Impacts of U.S. Food Waste, Environmental Protection Agency, November 2021.
5. Jones JM. Food processing: criteria for dietary guidance and public health? *Proc Nutr Soc.* 2019.
6. Juul F et al. Ultra-processed food consumption among US adults from 2001 to 2018. *Am J Clin Nutr.* 2022.
7. U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025, 9th Edition. December 2020.
8. American Heart Association, “How can I eat more nutrient-dense foods?”
9. Position of the American Dietetic Association, Total Diet Approach to Healthy Eating, *J Acad Nutr Diet.* 2013.
10. Miller KB et al. Role of food industry in promoting healthy and sustainable diets. *Nutrients.* 2021.
11. Rose D et al. Single-item substitutions can substantially reduce the carbon and water scarcity footprints of U.S. diets. *Am J Clin Nutr.* 2022.
12. Stylianou et al. Small targeted changes can yield substantial gains for human health and the environment. *Nat Food.* 2021.
13. Baldrige AS et al. The healthfulness of the US packaged food and beverage supply: a cross-sectional study. *Nutrients.* 2019.
14. Fardet A, Rock E. Ultra-processed foods and food system sustainability: What are the links? *Sustainability.* 2020.
15. Gustafson DI et al. Making Healthy, Sustainable Diets Accessible and Achievable: A New Framework for Assessing the Nutrition, Environmental and Equity Impacts of Packaged Foods. *Curr Dev Nutr.* 2022.