Over the next few decades the world potentially faces a major food crisis as the global population increases and demand for food grows. Urgent action is now required to address current eating habits if we are to protect the future of our planet and its inhabitants. Individual action is urgently required but will also need support from all stakeholders; all stakeholders must play an active role if we’re to be successful in moving towards a more sustainable way of eating. To address this, Alpro organised a symposium that brought together experts who considered these issues and provided their recommendations to help drive a universal shift towards more healthy, sustainable food choices.

Producing food has huge environmental implications and these are related to changes in the way valuable land is used, pollution, climate change, pressures on wildlife and on natural resources such as water and energy supplies. This will no longer be practical, or sustainable, based on the growing population and current dietary trends. It’s now well recognised that producing animal foods is more environmentally damaging than plant foods. ‘Eighteen percent of global greenhouse gas emissions come from livestock’ explained Mr Tony Long, Director of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) European Policy Office. ‘Large amounts of land and natural resources are required not only to graze animals, but also to grow crops and feed these animals."

Key Recommendations for Consumers…

- Eat more plant foods and be aware that next to seeds, nuts, fruit and vegetables, there is a wide variety of plant-based dairy and meat alternatives
- Reduce meat intake
- Base the diet on two thirds plant foods and one third from animal sources
- Don’t overeat - maintain a healthy weight by eating fewer foods high in fat/ and or sugar
- Cut down on waste
- Eat less processed foods

Practical Suggestions for Consumers…

- Base meals around plant foods
- Choose plant-based snacks such as fruit (fresh and dried), nuts, seeds, whole-grain crackers, soy nuts, soy shakes, plain popcorn
- Don’t make meat the main focus of a meal… consider it an accompaniment
- Use less meat in dishes and replace it with beans, pulses, vegetables to bulk up the meal
- Eat two portions of sustainable fish a week (from certified suppliers) – one of which should be oily
- Have a meat free day one day a week
- Switch from dairy to non-dairy plant options e.g. chilled plant-based drinks and yoghurt alternatives
- Use seasonal fruit
- Try non-dairy puddings e.g. soy desserts and savour chilled almond milk

Dr Janice Harland, University of Bath Spa
In the UK diet a significant proportion of the nation’s food carbon footprint comes from meat/meat products and dairy foods. In an attempt to address this, and provide consumers with advice on how to eat a diet that is not only healthy, but also sustainable, WWF-UK has developed the ‘Livewell plate’. The recommendation in this pictorial guide is to eat more plant foods than currently and cut down on meat and processed high fat/high sugar foods. A similar model is now being considered for Europe. These guidelines are comparable to the UK’s healthy eating recommendations included in the Eatwell plate. However, a recent study found that very few people are achieving these dietary targets and those who do, are not achieving them in the most sustainable way. Instead, they are substituting higher fat animal foods for lower fat options, rather than introducing more plant foods. ‘Healthier diets that are currently being eaten do not appear more sustainable. The UK’s Eatwell plate recommendation of a diet that is at least two thirds plant food and no more than one third animal foods can be the basis for a cost effective, healthy and sustainable diet’ suggested Dr Janice Harland from the University of Bath Spa. ‘Further guidance is required on portion sizes and how to put the Eatwell plate recommendations into practice’.

Key Recommendations for Policy Makers and Educators...
- Incorporate both healthy eating and sustainable recommendations into European and national dietary guidelines
- Make it the social norm to choose healthy, sustainable foods
- Provide national guidance on portion sizes for different food groups
- Develop tools to enable people to become aware of their personal eco-footprint from food
- Use social media to inform and educate on sustainable food choices
- Provide tools to help consumers make practical changes such as menu and recipe ideas
- Work with supermarkets to enable people to make healthy, sustainable choices at the point of purchase

Key Recommendations for Food Providers...
- Provide easy access to a wide range of tasty, healthy sustainable food choices
- Position brands on the intrinsic product strengths so they address and overcome the health and environmental concerns of consumers
- Use positive messages to inform: ‘pure, fresh, healthy, value for money’
- Make it simple for consumers to choose, don’t complicate the message
- Go beyond a marketing campaign/social responsibility, health campaigns

The Netherlands is actively encouraging healthy and sustainable eating. In 2011, the Health Council for Netherlands produced ‘Guidelines for a Healthy Diet: the Ecological Perspective’ which encourages increasing plant foods and reducing animal foods in the diet; avoiding excess calories from foods high in fat and/or sugar; eating two portions of sustainable fish a week, one of which should be oily; reducing food waste; and eating according to the Wheel of Five food-based dietary guidelines.
‘A shift from the usual diet towards that described in the Guidelines for a healthy diet is not only good for health, but would also seem to be beneficial in terms of land use and greenhouse gas emissions’ stressed Mr Corné van Dooren, sustainable food expert from the Netherlands Nutrition Centre.

‘Nevertheless the time has come to re-evaluate the Wheel of Five guidelines taking into account sustainability’. This Centre is now using a variety of novel tools to educate, inform and assist people in achieving a healthy sustainable diet.

Lessons from healthy eating interventions, as well as consumer studies investigating features that drive sustainable food choices, suggest there are a number of factors that need to be considered if we are to be successful in changing people’s behaviour. ‘We need to ensure consumers care more about sustainability, believe their personal choice can make a difference, and provide more healthy, tasty, credible, sustainable options’ emphasised Professor Wim Verbeke, from the University of Ghent.

Brands also have a role to play in changing consumer behaviour. Many people are looking for inspiration on choosing healthier, sustainable foods, yet they’re uncertain how to do it. At the same time they’re concerned about price, health and excessive packaging of food. ‘By focusing on these concerns, and relating them to the benefits of the food, brands can help solve these problems. Careful positioning can create brands that are demanding and leading which have the ability to change consumers perception, shift dietary behaviour and at the same time bring about health and environmental benefits’, explained Katrien Barrat Partner at Futureproofed Consultancy.

Key Recommendations for the Media...

- Raise awareness of the important issue of food sustainability
- Highlight the different impact of animal production and plant foods on the environment
- Describe how a sustainable diet can be achieved in practice
- Explain how an individual’s food choice can make a big difference

Alpro itself is a pioneer in marketing plant-based alternatives to dairy and meat to European consumers, and started doing so more than 30 years ago, even before the notion of sustainable food gained traction. Alpro recognizes changing consumer habits in a real challenge: “Plant-based products are only 1.8% of the European dairy market today, showing we are still in the early days of this much needed evolution. In order to build momentum, we reach out to all stakeholders who share our vision and drive to make this happen”, indicated Koen Bouckaert, VP Strategy and Business Development at Alpro. In order to make the debate more objective, Alpro made LCA analyses with consultant Ecofys and the University of Twente for both soy drinks, almond milk and soy burgers, showing the significant advantages of plant-based foods over dairy and meat in terms of land use, water use and carbon footprint. “Nevertheless, we know that more than evaluating objective numbers, the real moment of truth is when the consumer tastes our products. As a cherry on the cake, he then gets health and sustainability on top for free”, adds Bouckaert.