

Sustainability: How to follow Sustainable Diet

Organizers Guide

V 2.1.2

Consumer Reports Community Workshops

Thank you for volunteering to host a workshop about sustainability!

For over 80 years, Consumer Reports has been dedicated to working side by side with consumers for truth, transparency, and fairness among products and retailers. We know that food—where it comes from, how it is made, and how it gets to you—has never been more important.

In today's rapidly evolving world, what we do at Consumer Reports must be as transformative and groundbreaking as the new technologies, products, and services entering people's lives every day. We are passionate about our work because we know how much is at stake for you. We succeed in our mission every time your family gets a little bit safer, your finances get more secure, new technologies get more trustworthy, and the future gets that much brighter. Together we are creating a fairer, safer, and healthier world.

Introduction to the Organizer Guide

We know that running an event can be hard. We also know that food, labels, and sustainability in general can be confusing. We don't expect you to be an expert in either! That's why we've created this guide: to help you feel prepared, regardless of your previous experience. Read the guide carefully to capture the tips, tricks, and trusted methods we've listed that are sure to make your event an effective and fun convening for all those involved.

In this guide, there are multiple tips and corresponding activities that teach how to talk about serving sizes, food labels, the costs of organics, and more. Activities have suggested times and step-by-step instructions to help you facilitate the workshop. The instructions are meant to act as frameworks and can be adjusted to make the event feel more natural. Make the content your own. So *don't* use it like a script, but *do* make it personable and discussion-based. We estimate the entire module to take 80 minutes to complete, but we recommend adding a break and adjusting times where needed.

This workshop does take some advance work! The Organics vs. Conventional game on page 12 will require some preparation before the workshop starts.

If at any point you need additional support organizing your event or teaching activities, contact the CR team at community@cr.consumer.org. We are here to help you every step of the way.

Additional Documents

Participant workbook: The participant workbook should be given to every participant in your workshop and will serve as their activity book. The workbook also contains a glossary of key terms.

PowerPoint presentation: This PowerPoint contains the complete run of show, key points, and visual aids. This is *optional*, and you are **not** required to use this presentation.

Organizer toolkit: The toolkit contains details on how to organize and facilitate your workshop, as well as links and templates that can be easily adapted.

Welcome and Introduction

SUMMARY	In this module, facilitators will introduce the workshop and an icebreaker activity.
OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Introduce facilitator(s) and participants. → Set ground rules. → Hold an icebreaker discussion.
ESTIMATED TIME	20 minutes
ACTIVITY TYPE	Group discussion

STEP 1: Introductions



SLIDES 1 to 5

5 minutes

- Welcome participants to the workshop and introduce yourself. Participants should also introduce themselves at this time.
- Discuss why you have organized this event and what food and sustainability mean to you.
- Explain what Consumer Reports is and why it cares about this issue.
- Review the agenda for the day and share why the topic you chose is important—what are the threats and issues we face because of it?
- Describe the goals for the workshop. It is helpful to list topics covered in other modules (such as medical harm and digital privacy).
- Get people talking! Try the prompts below.

☐ Consumer Reports and Sustainability

- Consumer Reports has been representing consumer interests and rights for over 80 years as an active stakeholder in improving the quality and policies surrounding what we eat, the products we purchase, and the services we use.
- Consumer Reports has long been known for our food testing labs, where it tests everything from raw chicken and cured deli meats to apple juice and bottled water.

- There is a dedicated page on ConsumerReports.org about the latest in [food safety](#), including a recent new tool that [ranks food labels](#).
- Consumer Reports is continuing to put pressure on restaurants and farmers to [decrease the use of antibiotics in their meat production](#), and watching out for outbreaks and food product recalls.

? Questions

- ? What does eating sustainably mean to you?
- ? Why is it important to maintain a sustainable diet?

□ Importance of Eating Sustainably

- Maintaining a sustainable diet is a way of eating that can be maintained for the long haul that supports the individual and planet.
- The way food animals are raised has an impact on both human health and natural resources. Eating sustainable foods protects natural resources—land, water, animals, and insects—now and in the future.
- In addition, eating sustainably supports an eating pattern that reduces the risks of chronic diseases, such as diabetes, heart disease, and cancer.

□ Workshop Goals

The goal of these community workshops is to:

- Discuss important consumer information on a variety of topics—today, we’re here to talk about how you can improve your diet in a way that helps you and helps the planet.
- Share how you can also run these workshops in other community settings.
- Have fun!

STEP 2: Ground Rules



SLIDE 6

🕒 5 minutes

- Discuss the importance of ground rules at events.
- Share a list of ground rules that will allow for an open, safe, and fun environment.
- Ask participants if they have questions or if they wish to add to the ground rules.

Importance of Ground Rules

- It is important to set ground rules at events because it helps us to shape how we will collaborate with each other and to create a shared space where everyone feels open to contributing.
- Topics, such as privacy, can be very personal, and attendees can have a range of experiences, including some negative or conflicting ones.

Sample Ground Rules

- Listen actively—respect others when they are talking.
- We are all here to learn. Everyone’s opinion is valid and important. There are no bad ideas.
- The conversation is not meant to discredit any person, organization, group, demographic, or gender.
- Topics like privacy can be difficult for many reasons. Talk from your own experience, and be open and empathetic to others’ opinions.
- Your privacy means protecting your personal information. Share stories and information you are comfortable with, while not disclosing sensitive information about your accounts.
- The intent is to participate to our full capabilities and to work together.

STEP 3: Icebreaker



SLIDE 7



WORKBOOK 1

 10 minutes

- Instruct participants to get into pairs, preferably with someone they don’t know.
- Ask the pairs to discuss answers to each question.
- Bring the group back together for a quick debrief and invite them to share highlights of their answers if they feel comfortable.
- Indicate where restrooms and exits are, and go over other bits of housekeeping.

Questions

- ? What are two challenges that you’ve faced when trying to maintain a sustainable diet?
- ? Have you succeeded in resolving those challenges? If so, how?
- ? What’s the one thing someone in your family cooked better than *anyone*?

☐ **Debrief**

- What sort of challenges do people face in maintaining a sustainable diet?
- Who learned about a new family recipe?

Eat More Plants

Activity 1: Plating Your Meal

SUMMARY	In this module, the facilitator will explain the benefits of a plant-based diet and how it is central to maintaining a sustainable diet. The module also includes a “plating your meal” activity.
OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Understand how plants are part of maintaining a sustainable diet. → Reimagine meals to include more plants.
ESTIMATED TIME	15 minutes
AUDIENCE	Beginner level
ACTIVITY TYPE	Group discussion
MATERIALS	Pens and workbooks

STEP 1: Eat More Plants



SLIDE 8



WORKBOOK 3

5 minutes

- Indicate the first tip, to **eat more plants**.
- As a group, discuss why having a meal that is focused on vegetables, fruits, and whole grains is important.

☐ What Is the Importance of a Plant-Based Diet?

- People who eat more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, and legumes, and less meat, gain many health advantages, such as a reduced risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, cancer, and obesity.
- Plant-based diets put less of a strain on the environment, requiring less energy, land, and water use.

STEP 2: Plating Your Meal



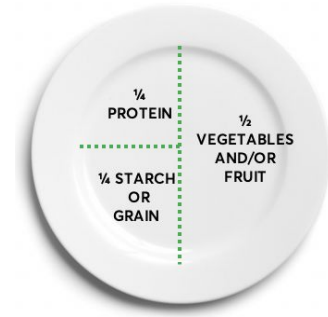
SLIDES 9, 10, and 11



WORKBOOK 3

10 minutes

- Ask participants to draw what their last breakfast, lunch, or dinner looked like on the handout.
- After they have drawn their meal and few of the drawings have been shared with the group, compare the plates with the samples on page 2 in the workbooks.
- The ideal plate is close to a quarter protein, a quarter starch, and half fruits and vegetables.
- Ask participants how their plate compared with Consumer Reports' ideal, and to reflect on what they found.
- Ask participants to brainstorm meal ideas like the ones in the workbook.



Meal Suggestions

- A majority of adults don't get the daily recommended servings of fruits and vegetables—1½ to 2½ cups of fruit and 2 to 3½ cups of vegetables.
- Downsize the portions of meat or poultry you eat. A serving should be 3½ to 4 ounces, or a piece about the size of the palm of your hand.
- Use meat as a condiment. Think of a stir-fry with lots of vegetables and rice and just a few strips of beef or chicken.
- Consider different types of protein—lentils, black beans, and tofu, to name a few.
- Incorporate more produce into every meal. You can even do this at breakfast: For example, try radishes or mashed avocado on whole-wheat toast or baked tomato halves as a side with eggs.
- Consider giving up meat one day a week. There is a popular campaign called Meatless Mondays with the purpose of giving up meat on just that day or any other day.
- You can also decide to take what's called the Vegan Before 6 approach. That's when you stick to plant foods for breakfast and lunch, then at dinner you can have meat, cheese, dairy, etc.

Additional reading: [The Benefits of a Plant-Based Diet](#)

? Questions

- How many people had a plate that looks like the ideal or similar?
- What are some other ways you have incorporated more plants into your diet and/or reduced the amount of meat you take in each day?
- In your workbooks, there are examples of sustainable options for each meal. Are those things you'd eat?
- What are some of your traditional meals that might fit in this definition of sustainable?

Activity 2: Go Organic When You Can

SUMMARY	Participants will play a pricing game on conventional vs. organic food and think through the costs of organics.
OBJECTIVE	→ Identify strategies on how to save when shopping organic.
ESTIMATED TIME	15 minutes
AUDIENCE	Beginner level
ACTIVITY TYPE	Group quiz activity and group discussion
MATERIAL	Pens

STEP 1: Before the Workshop, Find Prices

- **Ahead of the presentation,** go to a local grocery and find the price for a few conventional produce items *and* their organic counterparts. Record the produce name, the price, and the amount (ounces or pounds) for both. The goal is to challenge the notion that organic produce is always much more expensive than conventional.
- **Create flash cards,** on paper, on your slides, or on the facilitator visual aids below, which record the information of the conventional so that people can guess the organic equivalent.
- The issue of food deserts often comes up as a question during these workshops. Food deserts are areas in the country where access to fresh foods, vegetables, and other foods is limited. These areas are often found in lower-income communities, urban areas, and/or rural communities. While Consumer Reports does not work on this issue, there are several local, statewide, and national organizations that do. We encourage you to look up local organizations that advocate around food deserts and/or direct service organizations that provide free or reduced-price fresh food to families and individuals in need. You can provide those resources during your workshop.

STEP 2: Conventional vs. Organic



SLIDES 12 to 17

10 minutes



WORKBOOK 4 and 5

- Explain that CR recommends buying organic *when you can*.
- Ask participants if they know how to define terms like organic, pesticides, antibiotics, and GMOs.
- Have participants turn to page 4 in their workbooks and write down what they think the organic equivalent to your conventional prices would be. You can play this game in one of these ways:
 - ◆ Saying the conventional prices aloud.
 - ◆ Printing a visual aid to write the price down and show people.
 - ◆ Inserting the prices into a slide deck.

? Some Quick Definitions

- **ORGANIC:** produce grown without the use of synthetic pesticides, treating fields with synthetic fertilizers or sewage sludge, giving farm animals antibiotics or artificial hormones for growth promotion, planting genetically engineered seed (GMOs), feeding farm animals GMOs or animal byproducts, and more.
- **PESTICIDES:** chemicals used in farming to kill pests, such as weeds or insects that can harm the plant the farmer is trying to grow. Residues of these chemicals can be present on the foods you eat, but the chemicals can also contaminate soil and water, as well as harm the health of farmworkers.
- **ANTIBIOTICS,** in context of food: medication that's often given to animals raised for food and often given in low doses over the course of their lives. The drugs are used to prevent disease that can develop and spread because of the crowded and unsanitary conditions present in industrial farming.
- **GMOs (genetically modified organisms):** plants, animals, or other organisms whose genetic material has changed in ways that do not naturally occur.

□ Organic Discussions

- People who have reported eating organic produce had lower levels of breakdown products of highly toxic pesticides in their bodies compared with those who rarely or never did.

- One advantage of buying organic meat and poultry is that the animals have not been raised with antibiotics.
- We understand that buying organic may be difficult for some individuals and families, and want to acknowledge those difficulties. We focus on how to save on buying organic and provide recommendations of the produce that consumers should prioritize when purchasing organically, but that is not possible for every audience.

STEP 3: Go Organic When You Can

 5 minutes

- As a group, discuss what people expected about organic prices, and whether their expectations were met during the game.
- As a group, discuss tips for buying organic and ways to save money.

Tips to Save Money on Organics

- Some fruits and vegetables are known to have higher pesticide residue than others. Consumer Reports recommends buying organic for fruits and vegetables that fall into that category. These include carrots, cranberries, green beans, hot peppers, nectarines, peaches, tangerines, strawberries, sweet bell peppers, and sweet potatoes. This list is also in the workbook on page 5.
- Look for store brands: Organic store-label products cost 18 percent less than comparable brand-name versions, according to the market research firm Nielsen.
- Look in the freezer case: Organic vegetables there may be cheaper than fresh, and the nutritional quality is similar.
- Check the weight: When organic produce is sold prepackaged at a set price rather than by the pound, it's worth taking the time to weigh a few packages. CR found that the amount in the package sometimes exceeded the weight listed.
- Sign up for coupons: Organic brands such as Amy's Kitchen, Ancient Harvest, Horizon, Organic Valley, Simply Organic, and Stonyfield Farm Organic provide coupons on their website or if you sign up for their newsletters.

Additional reading: [7 Ways to Save on Organic Food](#)

Activity 3: Would You Trust This Label?

SUMMARY	In this module, participants will identify the meaning of food labels by playing a game.
OBJECTIVE	→ Identify and distinguish between claims and images on food labels.
ESTIMATED TIME	15 minutes
AUDIENCE	Beginner level
ACTIVITY TYPE	Group game play
MATERIAL	Visual aids

STEP 1: Labels Game



SLIDES 18 to 24



WORKBOOK 6 and 7

5 minutes

- Ask participants to indicate (through thumbs-up or thumbs-down) whether they trust each of the labels.
- Hold up the appropriate visual aid or use slides as you prefer.
- After each question is answered, provide participants more information. If you'd like, you can cut the questions from the How to Follow a Sustainable Diet Visual Aids document to resemble "game show host" cards, or use the cards below.

☐ Resource: Food Labels

- Consumer Reports has a [Food Labels ranking system](#).
- There is a take-home guide in your workbook for some of the common labels.

#1 Game Cards



SLIDE 19

Question 1: Let's start off easy. Would you trust this label?

Answer 1: Yes. "Organic" is the only production claim that is backed by federal law and regulations that set a uniform standard for what can be labeled organic. The federal organic standards are comprehensive, promote sustainable agriculture, and aim to minimize negative impacts on the environment and human health. There is no additional information that consumers need to look for on a label. By federal law, a product cannot be called organic unless it has been certified. Most producers choose to use the USDA Organic seal from the Department of Agriculture on their certified organic products. Any product with an "organic" claim but without the USDA Organic seal *still has to be certified organic*.



#2 Game Cards



SLIDES 20 and 21

Question 2: Is this first apple organic?

Answer 2: No. There's a trick to identifying certified organic fresh fruits and vegetables that don't come in a package with the USDA Organic label. Loose produce will have a small sticker or a rubber band, printed with a code of four to six numbers, like the second apple.



If the code has four digits, the produce is conventional. If the code has **five digits and starts with a nine**, the produce is certified organic.

#3 Game Cards



SLIDE 22

Question 3: Would you trust this label?

Answer 3: Sometimes. This label is sometimes verified and somewhat consistent. The “raised without antibiotics” claim on meat and poultry means that the animals were not given antibiotics in their feed or water, or by injection. To use the claim on a meat or poultry label, the producer has to send an application with supporting documentation to the USDA, but **no on-farm inspection is required**. For dairy products and egg labels, which are regulated by the Food and Drug Administration, label approval is not required and the FDA has no regulatory definition for “raised without antibiotics” labels.



There are several meaningful labels that also address antibiotic use in their standards. If you see any of these labels **together** with the “raised without antibiotics” label, you can have much more trust in the claim. They are on workbook page 7.

#4 Game Cards



SLIDE 23

Question 4: Would you trust this label?

Answer 4: No. The “natural” label is not verified and is not meaningful. There are no consistent standards to ensure that the label means what it implies to consumers. Each company can use its own definition, and definitions vary widely. Government agencies provide only guidance, not regulations, for companies using the “natural” claim.



#5 Game Cards

SLIDE 24

Question 5: Would you trust this label?

Answer 5: No, but look for additional verification. The “Non GMO” claim means that the food is made without ingredients that were derived from genetically engineered organisms. The claim isn’t always third-party verified, so look for additional information on the label for assurance that a third party verified the claim. The “organic” label provides this assurance, as do some certification programs like Non GMO Project Verified.



STEP 2: How Do We Shop?

 5 minutes

→ Discuss different labels and how you use them in real life.

? Questions

- Who learned something new about a label?
- What other labels do you have questions about?
- How do you use food labels (if at all) when shopping?

Activity 4: Go Local and Cut Food Waste

SUMMARY	In this module, facilitators will briefly explain the importance of shopping locally and lead participants in a discussion of crowdsourcing local stores, programs, and/or farmers markets that sell local food. There is also a resource for how to cut food waste.
OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Identify local stores, programs, and/or farmers markets that sell local food. → Identify tips on cutting food waste.
ESTIMATED TIME	20 minutes
AUDIENCE	Beginner level
ACTIVITY TYPE	Group discussion
MATERIAL	Workbook resources

STEP 1: Go Local, When Possible



SLIDES 25, 26, and 27



WORKBOOK 8



10 minutes

- Explain that CR recommends going local *when you can*.
- Define what local means to the group.
- If possible, record some of the crowdsourced knowledge about places to get good local food.

? Questions

- Do you shop at farmers markets or stores in your neighborhood?
- Where are they?
- Which ones do you like, and why?
- Do you know of any government programs that provide fresh food for low-income individuals or families?
- What other labels do you have questions about?

Shopping Local

- On average, produce travels about 1,500 miles from farm to store.
- The produce at the farmers market is often picked ripe and sold within a day.
- Local produce has a significantly smaller carbon footprint than fruit and veggies that have been trucked hundreds of miles to the supermarket. Local meat and poultry is often (but not always) raised on sustainable farms that don't use antibiotics.
- **Local does not always mean organic.**
- When you buy certified organic produce, you know that the growers have followed these best practices and that their farming methods are sustainable and better for the environment.
- While not every farmer at your local market will bother with the formalities of certification, they may still follow some or all of the USDA's organic guidelines.

Additional reading: [Farmers Market Produce: Local vs. Organic](#)

STEP 2: Eat What You Buy!



SLIDES 28 and 29

 10 minutes



WORKBOOK 8, 9, and 10

- Explain the importance of food waste.
- Ask participants what they do with food that might be close to going into the trash.

Facts About Cutting Food Waste

- Consumers toss the most food: One in every 4 bags of groceries, a total of \$1,500 per family of four each year in the U.S.
- The damage caused by food waste is global: water, energy, and labor it takes to grow, package, and transport the food that never gets eaten.
- Food that has been tossed is the biggest component of landfills.

Additional reading: [Spoiler Alert: You're Wasting 1 in 4 Bags of Groceries](#)

□ 12 Ways to Fight Food Waste

1. **Use broccoli stalks.** Peel and thinly slice them into coin-shaped rounds. Sauté them as you would other vegetables, or add to soup or pasta dishes. You can also purée the cooked stems and mix with broth for a broccoli soup. The leaves are edible, too. Use in sautés alone or with other greens.
2. **Cook slightly wilted lettuce.** If your lettuce greens are too limp to serve raw, sauté them briefly in a little butter or olive oil and garlic and eat them like spinach.
3. **Save the tops.** Beet and turnip greens are nutritious and perfectly edible. Cook them the way you would spinach. Celery leaves can be used as an herb. Try them in place of parsley in grain dishes or to make a pesto that you can use as a sandwich spread.
4. **Perk up wilted celery and carrots.** Soaking in ice water will restore crispness so you can use them in your recipes. (This technique works for herbs and lettuce, too.)
5. **Don't reject ugly fruit.** Fruit that has gone too soft (but not moldy) can be tossed into smoothies or can be cooked in a little sugar to create a topping for oatmeal or yogurt.
6. **Toast up stale bread.** Day-old bread makes great toast, or cube it and toss with vegetables and dressing for a panzanella-style salad. You can also grind it in a food processor to make breadcrumbs that can be used to top pasta dishes or soups, or as a coating for chicken, fish, or pork.
7. **Roast squash seeds.** If you like pumpkin seeds, you'll find the seeds from a butternut or acorn squash to be just as tasty. Toss in olive oil, sprinkle with salt, and roast in the oven for a healthy snack.
8. **Question expiration dates.** Most consumers don't realize that these dates are set by food manufacturers and are about quality, not food safety or nutritional loss. Expiration dates are often conservative, and you might not notice a difference in quality if you exceed them (especially if the expiration date was recent).
9. **Know yourself.** Track what you throw out and why, then adjust your shopping and cooking habits accordingly to minimize waste.
10. **Plan a catch-up meal.** Pick one night a week when you will only eat the food that is already in your fridge. Place whatever needs to be eaten first in the front of your fridge to keep it in mind.
11. **Mix it up.** Don't be afraid to experiment with eclectic ingredients. Got an open jar of salsa and some extra chicken broth? You can turn that combo into the base for a tortilla soup.
12. **Befriend your freezer.** Some unexpected foods do well in the freezer, including milk, bread, cheese, and raw eggs if you crack and beat them lightly first. You can also freeze most vegetables after blanching them.

Conclusion

SUMMARY	Close out your workshop with one final reflection.
OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Discuss what participants are taking away from the workshop. → Share what participants can expect after the workshop.
ESTIMATED TIME	10 minutes
ACTIVITY TYPE	Group discussion

STEP 1: Final Comments



SLIDES 30 and 31

5 minutes



WORKBOOK 10

- If your group is small, have everyone comment on something they learned, found interesting, or will do differently as a result of the workshop.
- If you have a large group, ask individuals to break off into pairs and discuss their reflections with another person. Bring the group back together and ask if anyone wants to share what was discussed.
- Encourage the group to share any outstanding questions or comments.

? Suggested Prompts

- What is one thing you will take away from the workshop?
- How will you share something you learned with someone who didn't attend this workshop?

STEP 2: Next Steps



SLIDE 32

 5 minutes

- Discuss what happens after the workshop. Is another workshop scheduled? Where can people go for more information?
- Share ways you plan on following up with individuals. What can they expect in a post-event email? Every guide comes with links that can be shared in your email, in addition to the resources in the workbook. Be sure to highlight these articles now and include them in your email.
- If people are interested in **three free months of Consumer Reports** (the magazine and/or digital access), they can fill out the final page in their workbook and leave it with you.
- Ask participants: If Consumer Reports trained them to give this workshop, would they be interested in hosting a meeting like this, where they invite their friends and family or community members? Who else needs this information ?
 - ◆ If so, have them indicate their interest on the last page of the workbook.
- **Bonus:** As optional homework, invite participants to be in touch with you and each other about how they are making their diets more sustainable over the next month!

Resources and Links

The resources and links below are to aid your workshop. They might be helpful for you to review before the workshop and learn more about the topic, or you can share them with your participants during the workshop, or even send to participants after the workshop.

Additional Resources

RESOURCE: [Consumer Reports' Guide to Food Labels](#)

RESOURCE: [Consumer Reports food safety page](#)

ARTICLE: [Farmers Market Produce: Local vs. Organic](#)

ARTICLE: [Spoiler Alert: You're Wasting 1 in 4 Bags of Groceries](#)

ARTICLE: [The Benefits of a Plant-Based Diet](#)

REPORT: [Chain Reaction: a report on antibiotic use by fast-food chains.](#)