

# UNEXPECTED BENEFITS OF A PLANETARY HEALTH DIET ON URBAN BIODIVERSITY

**Rising globalization and urbanization threaten biodiversity and shift food consumption patterns, often to the detriment of human health. Cities, home to over half of the global population, consume 80 percent of all food produced and are a significant driver of greenhouse gas emissions and environmental degradation – with impacts well beyond city boundaries.**

Cities are already taking action to provide a “Planetary Health Diet<sup>1</sup> for their citizens. Two examples: Quezon City, Philippines, has been implementing a thriving urban farming program, and Copenhagen, Denmark, has established a science-based target for its food system and tested interventions to improve local food environments to help achieve the target. Neither initiative started with an explicit biodiversity objective, but these are types of interventions that contribute to urban biodiversity while achieving other goals.

*Urban farming in Quezon City:* To combat the triple burden of malnutrition and persistent hunger in the city, then-Vice Mayor Belmonte established the “Joy of Urban Farming” program in 2010. With goals of supporting low-income households to grow nutritious food, bringing nature back into the city, and integrating circularity principles, the program demonstrates how city dwellers can farm through various space-efficient techniques. In part-

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nership with national agencies, Joy of Urban Farming trains over 6,000 people annually and has been implemented in multiple day-care centers, communal areas, and public schools across the city<sup>2</sup>.

*Improving food environments in Copenhagen:* Reshaping local food environments can facilitate healthier and more sustainable food choices while enhancing biodiversity outcomes. In Copenhagen, the municipality and partners<sup>3</sup> have worked to understand how public space affects people's food behavior. Urban design firm Gehl tested prototype food environment interventions in two Copenhagen neighborhoods.<sup>4</sup> Co-designed with local youth, each prototype had three components: pop-up seating arrangements with edible gardens; grocery stores offering special deals on Planetary Health Diet foods; and food trucks providing subsidized Planetary Health Diet menus. The edible gardens were designed to provide an inviting public space and raise awareness about local

and sustainable food – and had the added benefit of supporting biodiversity in these urban spaces. Incremental behavior change was observed in hundreds of people during the prototypes; this approach could be applied in other locations with the potential to change food behavior at scale.

Both cities – along with 13 others from across the globe – have signed the C40 Good Food Cities Declaration,<sup>5</sup> committing to providing their citizens with diets that are beneficial for both human health and natural systems. Efforts to improve urban food systems can result in benefits to biodiversity, even if starting points and explicit goals may be different.

Food is a crucial lever to bring stakeholders together for a wide range of beneficial outcomes. More actors must get on board with this growing push for the transformation of urban food systems – a critical ingredient in addressing health and environmental challenges while improving biodiversity within and beyond urban areas.

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