Organic food for sustainable and healthy diets - lessons from the Nordic diet?

Introduction: The New Nordic Diet (NND) was developed in 2004 by chefs and food professionals from the five Nordic countries. The goal for the NND was that it should be based on traditional regional food products but healthier than the traditional eating habits. The NND builds on four key principles: Nordic identity, health, gastronomic potential and sustainability. Objectives: Can the NND be used as a model for a sustainable diet in other geographical regions? Methods/design: The NND can be described by a few overall guidelines: 1) more calories from plant foods and fewer from meat; 2) more foods from the wild countryside and 3) more foods from sea and lakes. In many ways, the New NND is very similar to a Mediterranean diet but relies on rapeseed (canola) oil instead of olive oil and ramson instead of garlic. The diets differ in their types of produce due to regional differences in climate, soil and water. Results: The health effects and sustainability of the NND has been tested in a number of scientific studies, including the OPUS project (Optimal Well-Being, Development and Health for Danish Children through a Healthy New Nordic Diet) supported by the Nordea foundation (http://foodoflife.ku.dk/opus/english/nyheder/publikationer/) in which the NND was compared to the Average Danish Diet (ADD). The use of mostly local products and reduction of the meat intake were of both socioeconomic and environmental advantage. Including organic produce increased environmental impact of the NND. Conclusion: In line with the Mediterranean diet the NND is a predominantly plant-based diet, and although the two have not been directly compared, it would be fairly safe to assume that they are equally healthy. Overall, the NND is just a regional interpretation of the tenets of healthy eating. Basically the principles of the NND could be incorporated into any regional diet.

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