Sustainability in Sports Nutrition: From Evidence to Practice in Elite Football

Sustainability is becoming an increasingly important consideration in sports nutrition. However, translating sustainable dietary recommendations into elite sport is not always straightforward. In professional football, nutrition must first support performance, recovery and athlete health, while also fitting the practical realities of training, travel, catering and individual preferences.

This presentation takes a practical look at how sustainability can become part of everyday sports nutrition without compromising performance. Rather than focusing on plant-based diets or eliminating animal products, it explores a **plant-forward approach**: gradually increasing the contribution of plant foods, reconsidering how and where animal products are used, and making more sustainable choices easier within the existing performance nutrition framework. In a club setting, the buffet provides an opportunity to introduce athletes to well-prepared plant-forward dishes before expecting them to make or prepare these choices themselves.

In addition, some more sustainable food choices may fit particularly well within specific phases of the football microcycle, such as match preparation or recovery. Presenting these choices through a **performance-focused approach**— showing athletes where they may also support their performance goals — can help make the change more relevant and build trust.

An important part of this process is the **performance kitchen**. Sports dietitians do not implement nutrition strategies alone — chefs and catering teams translate them into the meals athletes actually eat. Close collaboration between dietitians and chefs can therefore help turn sustainability goals into practical changes in recipes, menus, food purchasing and everyday kitchen practice.

The presentation will also consider **food waste** as an important but often overlooked part of sustainable sports nutrition. Strategies such as better meal planning, monitoring food waste, improving communication with catering teams and creating systems for the safe use of surplus food can reduce environmental impact without compromising nutritional support.

Finally, the potential impact of football extends far beyond the players. Millions of fans attend matches and many more follow football around the world, making clubs and sporting events powerful environments for influencing food culture. **Matchday catering** therefore represents a largely underused opportunity to consider how food choices, waste management and event planning could contribute to more sustainable sport.

Rather than asking athletes to completely change the way they eat, sustainable sports nutrition may be more effectively approached through gradual changes to the food environment — from the **performance kitchen to the stadium**. Making sustainable options familiar, practical, appealing and compatible with performance can help move sustainability from recommendation to everyday practice in elite sport.

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