THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH
Global Academy of
Agriculture and Food Systems

Data-Driven Innovation
Part of the Edinburgh & South East Scotland City Region Deal

Food groups

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Nutrients are found in foods, but people eat foods, not nutrients

- Most people don’t need to estimate nutrients
- Nutrient amounts are hard to know for sure
- It is better to keep things simple
- Eating from a range of food groups is best
- Some nutrients are denser in certain food groups
- Combining food groups can enhance nutrients
- Combining food groups can enhance enjoyment

Photo by Michele Blackwell on Unsplash

There are many food groups

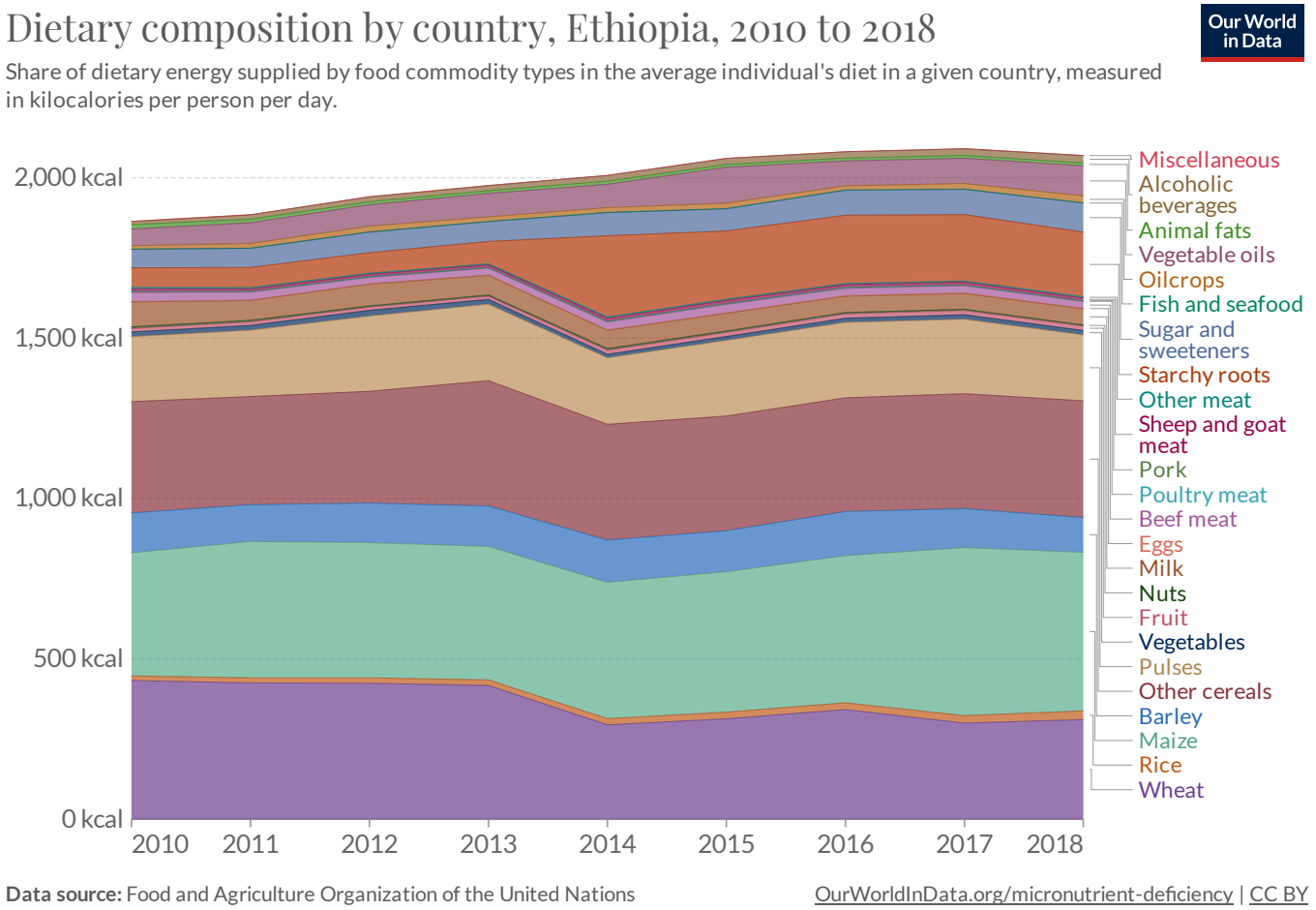
Food groups can be classified from a nutrition, culinary, or botanical perspective

- Beans and legumes might count as vegetables
- Fats and oils might be their own food group, or not
- Some foods that we use as vegetables are fruits (peppers, tomatoes, zucchini)
- Roots and tubers might be assigned to the same food group as other starchy staples like grains
- All meat might be put together, or fish might be separated out by itself
- Protein foods might be grouped all together
- These choices depend on individual needs, available data, and questions that need answered

Dietary diversity means the number of food groups consumed

- Researchers measure dietary diversity in different ways
- More diverse diets help promote health
- There are many ways to have a diverse diet
- Meals should ideally consist of at least 3 different food groups

Food groups data



Hannah Ritchie, Pablo Rosado and Max Roser (2023) - "Diet Compositions" Published online at OurWorldInData.org. Retrieved from: https://ourworldindata.org/diet-compositions [Online Resource]

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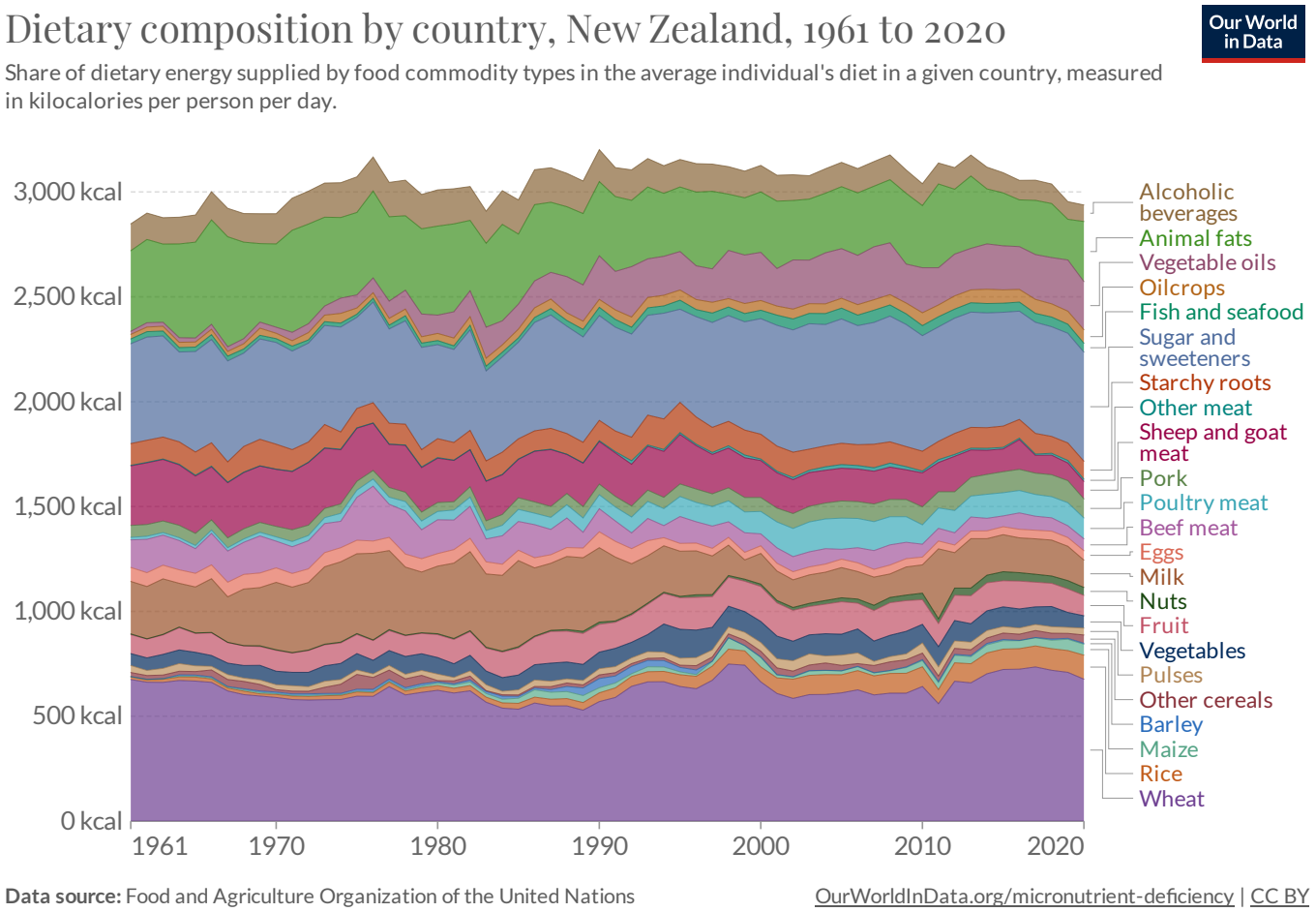

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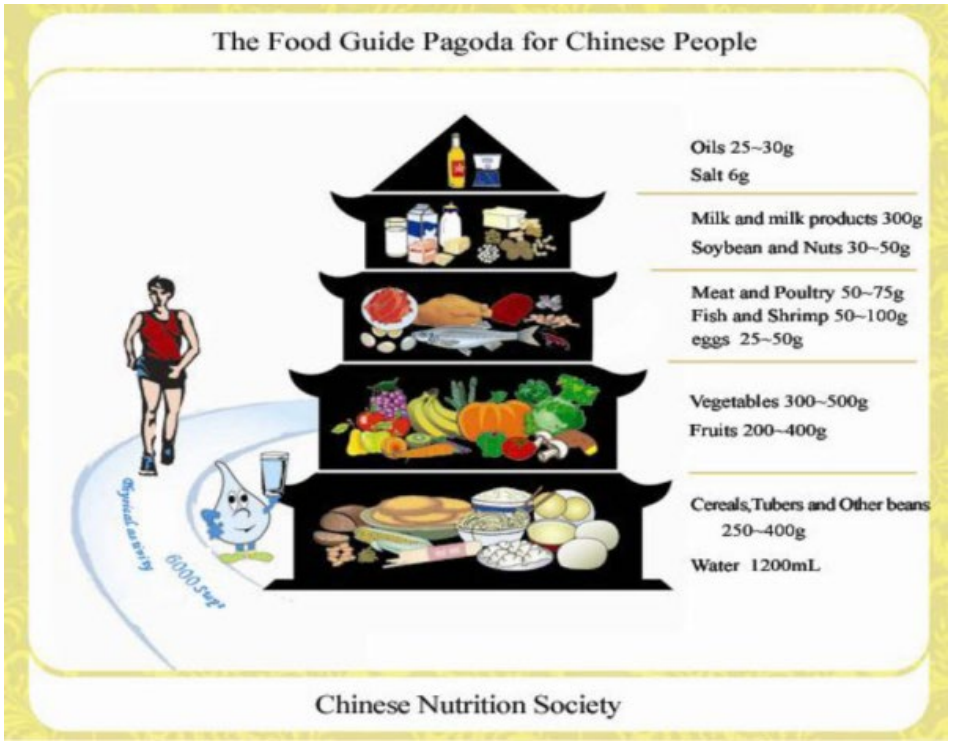
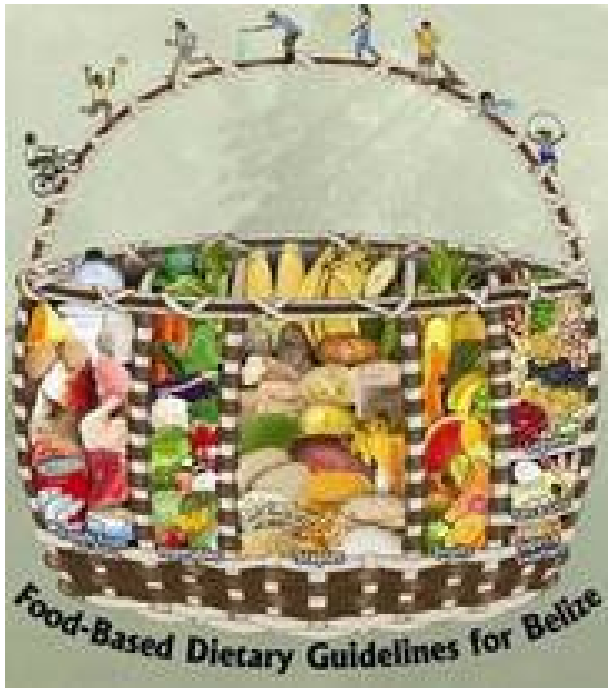
Governments around the world use food groups to provide dietary advice





Images from FAO database on food-based dietary guidelines

Governments around the world use food groups to provide dietary advice

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Data on food groups around the world

- The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Statistical Office has data on food groups in their Food Balance Sheets
- Our World in Data compiles these data and other data on food groups very nicely, as summarized in their Diet Compositions article
- The FAO has a dataset called "Food Based Dietary Guidelines," for exploration around the world

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Thank you

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