



| Country Profile Saint Vincent & the Grenadines

Diet

The prevalence of overweight and obesity in Saint Vincent & the Grenadines (SVG) is high, with an estimated prevalence of 63% in adult (18+ years) women and 52% in adult men. This is helping to drive the high prevalence of diabetes (around 14% in women, 11% in men).¹ Overweight/obesity and diabetes have been increasing for the past two decades and are continuing to do so. Associated with these conditions are cardiovascular disease and certain common cancers.^{4,7} Together, these non-communicable diseases (NCDs) account for 45% of all healthy life lost in 2019 in SVG.

A diet of excess calories, high in fat, sugar and salt, and low in fruit and vegetable (F&V) consumption is a key contributor to these rates of overweight and obesity, with 95% of the population consuming less than 5 servings of F&V per day.^{4,5} Calorie intake has increased since 1980, which has been associated with a decrease in agricultural output, an increase in food imports, increased access to food aid, increased cost of food, and a change in food preference towards more westernised processed and ultra processed foods.^{2,5} Age plays a factor in F&V and salt consumption, with young adults between 18-29 years old, consuming more salt but less F&V than adults over 45 years old.⁵

Regular sourcing of food from supermarkets, small shops and food service businesses is related to a higher consumption of sugar sweetened beverages and ultra processed foods.⁶ Many Vincentians choose to purchase imported, processed (less healthy) food over healthy organic local foods as they are sometimes less expensive, partly due to the subsidization of farmers in larger countries where these foods originate.⁷ Social determinants of health, including education, income and geography (i.e. urban or rural) also influence household diets in SVG.^{9,8}

Knowledge and Awareness

There is awareness of the health consequences of poor diets. However, this awareness does not necessarily translate into a change towards a healthier diet.⁵

The SVG Ministry of Health aims to increase awareness of unhealthy diet and lifestyles among the population, in order to build a better understanding of the risk factors, symptoms, and complications associated with diet-based NCDs.⁵ The Ministry has committed to coordinating with stakeholders to advocate for healthy public policies, creating supportive environments, reorienting health services, and mobilizing communities and individuals to act.^{3,5}

Community Food Production

Agriculture employs 26% of the population and 25% of the island is designated for farming, but agricultural outputs only make up 7% of SVG's GDP. Small scale farms, between 0.2 to 2.0 hectares, are the predominate farm size.⁹ The SVG key agricultural outputs are root vegetables, arrowroot starch, coconuts, spices, and bananas.¹⁰ Many of the food products sold in-country are transported from rural areas into the municipal market in the capital, Kingstown.¹¹

The agricultural sector has declined in overall importance to the economy due to the loss of preferential trading arrangements for bananas, entry of exotic diseases, and a series of damaging climate events over the last fifteen years, which have all impacted agricultural output.¹¹ The severity of the climate events, such as hurricanes, and other natural disasters, such as the La Soufriere volcano eruption, have resulted in severe losses for small-scale farmers.

Due to the challenges, farmers have shifted to unsustainable agricultural practices, such as mono-cropping and high use of artificial fertilizers and pesticides which have led to land degradation and soil erosion, increasing the sector's vulnerability to climate change.¹²

National and regional food system governance, explicit and implicit, can support community food production and agroecological farming approaches.⁹

Arrow root vegetable alone has the potential to significantly reduce the poverty of its grower. Not only are its uses broad - from the production of lower-carbon paper to gluten-free products - but SVG is unique in producing 95% of the world's arrowroot.⁹

Influences on Food Practice

Food and drink in SVG reflects the island's influences which include native Caribs, African, French and British.¹³ In some instances, food preparation techniques are uniquely Vincentian, such as methods of roasting and use of clay ovens and 'firesides'.

There is deep pride in eating locally grown food as well as respect for living off the earth (subsistence farming).⁹ A meal consisting of roasted breadfruit and Jack Fish, is the national dish, and other local and traditional foods include the Madungo bakes (made from arrowroot) and Ducana.¹³ Despite this rich culinary and food production history, there has been a shift in dietary patterns over the past decades due to high importation and consumption of processed foods, despite the country's ability to produce food domestically.⁵

Recognizing the multifaceted nature of the food and nutrition challenges, several collaborative efforts involving government agencies, NGOs, international funding agencies, and local communities are being carried out. Contributing to this is the Global Community Food for Human Nutrition and Planetary Health in Small Islands (Global CFaH) Project. Global CFaH responds to the nutrition, health, social, and economic wellbeing issues of small island states by applying approaches that develop healthy, resilient, and environmentally sustainable community-based food production.

Reference:

1. <https://globalnutritionreport.org/resources/nutrition-profiles/latin-america-and-caribbean/caribbean/saint-vincent-and-grenadines/>
2. Mohammadi, Elham, Simron J Singh, Cameron McCordic, and Jeremy Pittman. "Food Security Challenges and Options in the Caribbean: Insights from a Scoping Review." *Anthropocene Science* 1 (2022): 91-108.
3. GSVG. Food and Nutrition Security Plan of Action Policy for St. Vincent and the Grenadines 2008-2012, Final Report, 2014. [<https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/stv172922.pdf>]
4. Haynes E, Augustus E, Brown CR, Guell C, Iese V, Jia L, Morrissey K, Unwin N. Interventions in Small Island Developing States to improve diet, with a focus on the consumption of local, nutritious foods: a systematic review. *BMJ Nutr Prev Health*. 2022 Oct 20;5(2):243-253.
5. WHO STEPS - National Health and Nutrition Survey. Non-Communicable Disease Risk Factor Surveillance Report for St. Vincent and the Grenadines. March 2015. [<https://stats.gov.vc/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/2015-National-Health-and-Nutrition-Survey.pdf>]
6. Bhagtani D, Augustus E, Haynes E, Iese V, Brown CR, Fesaitu J, Hambleton I, Badrie N, Kroll F, Saint-Ville A, Samuels TA. Dietary Patterns, Food Insecurity, and Their Relationships with Food Sources and Social Determinants in Two Small Island Developing States. *Nutrients*. 2022 Jul 14;14(14):2891.
7. Guell C, Brown, CR, Iese V, Navunicagi O, Wairiu M, Unwin N, et al. We used to get food from the garden: Understanding changing practices of local food production and consumption in small island states. *Social Science & Medicine*. 2021; 284: 114214.
8. Bhagtani D, Augustus E, Haynes E, St Ville A, Iese V, Fesaitu J, Badrie N, Kroll F, Foley L, Hambleton I. P22 Prevalence of food insecurity and its associations with socio-demographic factors, food sources and dietary diversity, in small island developing states.
9. The Borgen Project. SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE IN ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES. [<https://borgenproject.org/sustainable-agriculture-in-st-vincent-and-the-grenadines/>]
10. RUAF. High time for resilient agriculture and food systems in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.[<https://ruaf.org/2021/08/03/high-time-for-resilient-agriculture-and-food-systems-in-st-vincent-and-the-grenadines/>]
11. Guell, Cornelia, et al. "Perspectives on strengthening local food systems in Small Island Developing States." *Food Security*, 04 May 2022: 1227-1240.
12. Instituto Interamericano de Cooperación para la Agricultura. Country Profile. St. Vincent and the Grenadines. 2017.Climate Change and Agriculture. Policies, strategies, and actions.
13. Searchlight. The Cultural Heritage of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. October 2008.[<https://www.searchlight.vc/special-feature/2008/10/24/the-cultural-heritage-of-st-vincent-and-the-grenadines/>]
14. FAO. Food-based dietary guidelines - Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. 2021.[<https://www.fao.org/nutrition/education/food-dietary-guidelines/regions/countries/Saint%20Vincent%20and%20the%20Grenadines/es>]
15. <https://hia.paho.org/en/countries-22/svg-country-profile>



FUNDED BY

NIHR | National Institute for Health and Care Research

This research was funded by the NIHR using UK international development funding from the UK Government to support global health research. The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the NIHR or the UK government.



THE UNIVERSITY
OF THE
WEST INDIES

www.communityfoodplanetaryhealth.org

August 2024