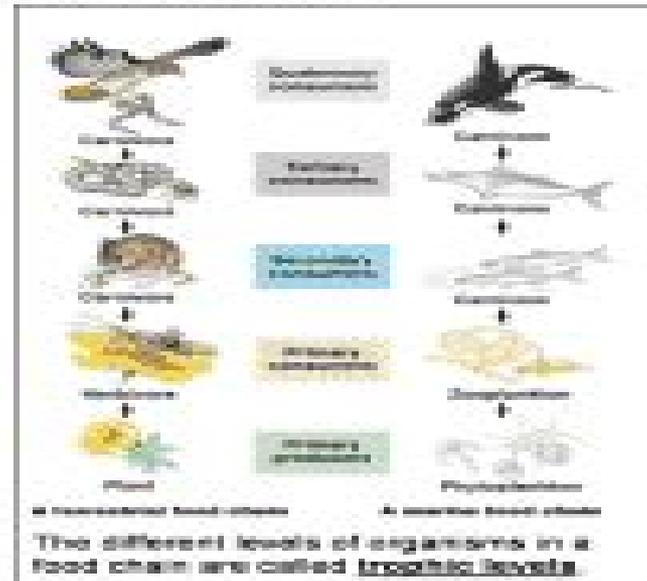


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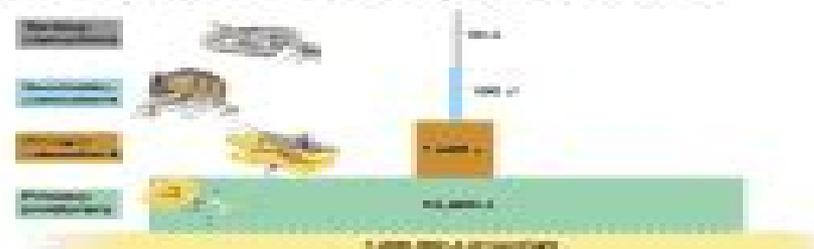
All organisms need an input of energy and nutrients to live. For animals, both of these come from the food they eat. For plants, the source of energy is the sun — they produce their own food through photosynthesis — and their source of nutrients is the soil.

The feeding relationships between organisms forms a food chain. **Producers** (plants, or **autotrophs**) capture the sun's energy and absorb nutrients from the soil to make their own food. **Primary consumers** (animals, **herbivores**, or **herbivores**) eat the plants and capture their energy and nutrients. **Secondary consumers** (animals, **herbivores**, or **carnivores**) eat the herbivores and capture their energy and nutrients. Third and fourth level consumers continue this chain by eating the lower level carnivores. Then finally **decomposers** breakdown waste and dead organisms recycling the nutrients back into the ecosystem, so they are available for another generation of plants and animals.

When a consumer eats another organism, only a small fraction of the energy taken in is used for growth. About 50% of the food is not digested or absorbed and is passed out as waste. About 40% of the energy of the food is lost from as heat or used by the organism for cellular respiration — making energy for daily life. Only about 10% of the food eaten is used for growth and is therefore available as energy to the next **trophic level** in the food chain. This produces a pyramid of energy and a pyramid of numbers in an ecosystem. The greatest amount of energy and the largest population is at the base of the pyramid with the producers. The least amount of energy and the smallest population is at the top of the pyramid in the top level consumers.



Only about 10% of the energy from the food eaten is used for growth.



Because of the loss of energy moving up the food chain, each trophic level can support fewer organisms.

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L Darling-Hammond



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