



Nourishing compassion for our bodies, the earth and all beings.

Diet and Climate Change Fact Sheet

Overview

Global warming caused by green house gas emissions is probably the biggest environmental challenge we face. The good news is that we have the power to influence that. Possibly the most important environmental action we can take is to reduce or eliminate our consumption of animal foods. Recent analyses by the National Academy of Sciences predict that between now and 2050, a global switch to diets that rely far less on meat and far more on vegetables, fruits, and other plant foods could reduce food-related greenhouse gas emissions by two-thirds!

Greenhouse gases

- Global warming is caused by gases that reflect heat back to the earth (or trap the heat).
- Carbon dioxide (CO₂) is one of the main contributors.
- BUT methane (CH₄) has 23 times more reflecting power than CO₂.
- Livestock are the main producers of methane, given that they produce large amounts of methane as part of their digestion. Their manure also produces methane.
- There is controversy on where animal agriculture is in the list of greenhouse gas producers. It has been said to be the worst offender (by the World Watch Institute), the second offender (by the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization) or the 5th offender (by the US EPA). The numbers vary if they accounted for the energy, transportation, deforestation and waste used by the agricultural industry to produce animal products. But, all agree that animal agriculture is a huge contributor.
- The GOOD news is that while CO₂ can stay for hundreds or thousands of years in the atmosphere, methane only stays for 15 years. So, our food choices today can help in the short term.

Transportation of Meat and Dairy

- We need to produce the grains to feed the livestock and then transport them to the animals, then transport the animals to be killed, and then transport the meat or dairy to the consumer.
- It is estimated that reducing meat by just 20% is like switching from a Camry to a Prius.

Deforestation

- The main cause of deforestation in the world is for livestock grazing.
- 80% of the Amazon's deforestation is due to meat production.
- CO₂ persists in the atmosphere from hundreds to thousand of years, so we need our trees to absorb the CO₂.
- One person eating a plant-based diet saves one acre of forest every year.

Water

- 75% of our water is used in agriculture, mostly for crops that are destined to feed animals.
- It takes:
 - 2500- 5000 gallons of water to produce a pound of meat
 - 500-1000 gallons for a quart of milk
 - 650 gallons for a pound of cheddar cheese
 - Only 108 gallons to produce a pound of corn or 138 gallons for a pound of wheat
- On average, it takes 20 times more water to produce one calorie of animal product than a plant calorie.

Waste

- In the US we have 10 billion animals for annual human consumption, and they produce 1.37 billion tons of excrement per year, enough to fill the NY Yankees Stadium 210 times.
- This waste ends up in the watersheds, polluting our water sources.

Consumption

- Meat (including poultry) consumption worldwide will double from 1964 to 2030, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN.
- Each step we can take to reduce that will be a positive one for the earth.