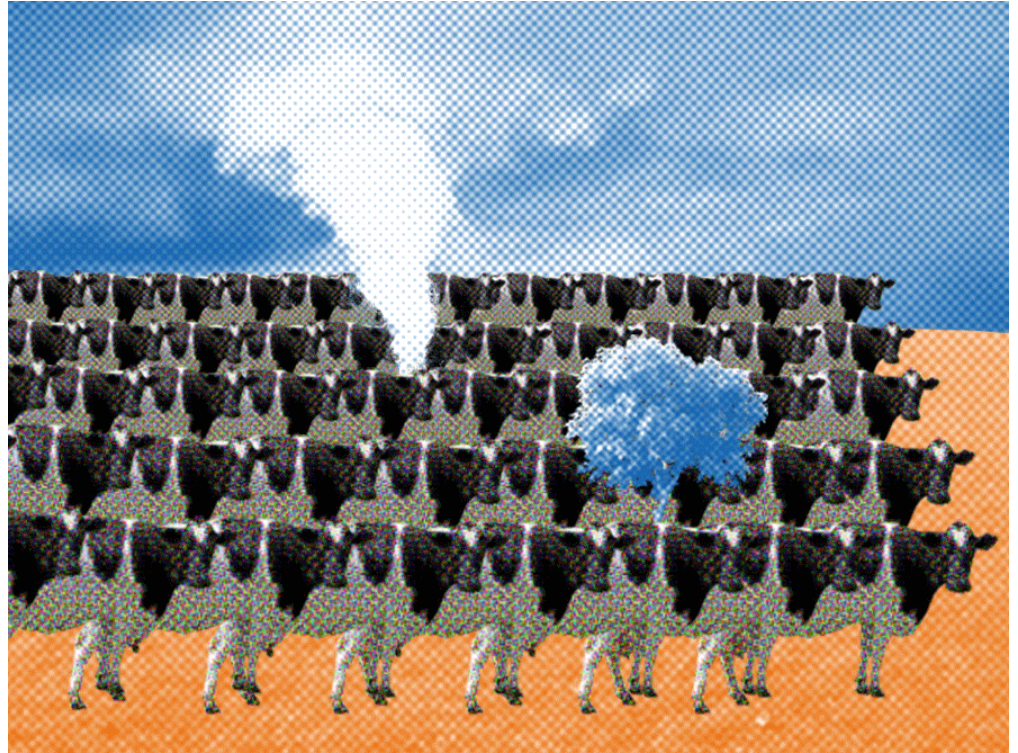


Eat less meat to save the planet, report warns

A new report argues that the world's growing appetite for meat, especially beef, is a greater threat to the environment than pollution from cars and aircraft. Is it time to turn vegetarian?



Animal rights advocates and vegetarian enthusiasts have long argued that meat is murder and that we should stop killing animals for food. But in recent years, environmentalists have entered this battle with a different argument: our global obsession with meat is murdering the planet.

A new **study** by Cambridge and Aberdeen universities is just the latest to warn that rising demand for beef and dairy products is taking a terrible toll on the Earth's natural resources. While we tend to associate climate change with practices such as **fracking** and the burning of fossil fuels, it is in fact the food we eat that is causing most harm to the environment.

As a result of our obsession with steaks and burgers, greenhouse gas emissions from food production are expected to rise 80% in the next 25 years according to the report, and the food industry alone will exceed the current total global emissions targets for 2050.

This is because as more and **more people** around the world get richer they are adopting US-style diets with increasing amounts of meat. To feed this demand, every year 65 billion animals are consumed — an average of nine for each person on the planet — and the pressure on farmers to supply us with meat is growing all the time.

But the effect on the environment is considerable. Livestock production accounts for 14.5% of global greenhouse emissions, as much as is produced by all the cars, planes, boats and trains in the world.

Nearly a third of the world's ice-free land is used to rear animals, and 30% of all crops grown are used to feed them. Tropical forests are torn down in order to grow food for livestock and a single cow can produce hundreds of litres of methane every day — a greenhouse gas 25 times more potent than carbon dioxide.

The report recommends that we cut down on our meat intake to no more than two

portions of red meat and seven of poultry per week. But more radical approaches, such as adjusting the diets of animals in order to lower their methane emissions and even experimenting with **'test tube'** meat, might prove more popular.

Let them eat steak?

The answer, say some, is simple: eat less meat. We must learn to cut down on burgers and instead fill our diets with grains, pulses and vegetables, reserving meat treats for special occasions. The responsibility rests on all of us to do our bit to save the planet.

But others are not convinced. Global health has improved considerably since 1990, thanks to the increase in the number of people who can now afford to include meat in their diets. Surely it should be celebrated that there are fewer hungry people in the world than there were in 1990, thanks to increased global meat consumption.

YOU DECIDE

1. Would you be willing to eat less meat to help prevent climate change?
2. Should we try to produce more eco-friendly meat and even artificial meat? Or just learn to eat less of it?

ACTIVITIES

1. In groups, draw a diagram that displays the information in this story.
2. Keep a record of what you eat for one week and see whether you exceed the report's recommended levels of meat and poultry. Can you change your diet, and encourage those around you to do the same?

SOME PEOPLE SAY...

"Eating meat is a natural human instinct."

What do you think?

Q & A

Q: Meat is delicious — I couldn't give it up!

A: There's no need to cut it out completely. The report recommends we eat less meat, and think more about how and where our food is sourced and produced. It may also mean switching your diet around a bit. The production of beef is far more damaging to the environment than the production of other types of meat, so we should certainly try to eat less of it. Chicken is far less harmful.

Q: But I thought meat was good for you, won't it be dangerous to eat less?

A: Meat in moderate amounts is a valuable source of protein, but too many of us eat unnecessarily large quantities of processed red meats, like burgers, which are bad for us. With so much variety of food available in the supermarkets, we can find all the nutrients we need and still eat less meat.

WORD WATCH

Study – The report, published in *Nature Climate Change*, comes to some stark conclusions. Even if every other industry cut greenhouse gas emissions to zero, the food industry could still cause serious global climate change on its own.

Fracking – A technique designed to extract oil and gas from shale rock, by drilling down into the Earth and injecting water and sand at high pressure. But fracking is controversial because of the amount of water required and the chemicals used.

More people – Global meat consumption is predicted to double in the next 40 years as people get wealthier. For example, China and India are expected to see an 80% boom in meat consumption by 2022.

Test tube – Scientists have begun to experiment with producing artificial meat, produced by persuading living cells from a cow to grow outside of its body under certain conditions, gradually evolving into proper muscle tissue. But the current cost of producing this test-tube meat, per portion, is more than £200,000.

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