

## **The Low Emissions Diet**

We were sold the idea that modern farming techniques, such as agrochemicals, genetic engineering and factory farming, would end hunger in the world. Now, autumn 2009, one in seven people are hungry. That's more than 14% of the planet's population and the figure is rising. At the same time, we now produce every year enough food to feed 12 billion, which is double the world's current population. We have been told a terrible lie and the truth is that modern farming is all about the unsustainable use of limited resources for just one reason. That reason is profit. The consequences of modern farming techniques on human health and on the environment are serious.

So, who is eating all this excess food? The world produces 70 million tonnes of beef a year and people in Britain now eat 50% more meat than they did in the 1960s, which is just about double the daily intake recommended by The World Health Organisation. Middle-aged men who eat meat have a 300% greater risk of heart disease than those who don't eat. And the World Cancer Research Fund recently announced that red meat causes intestinal cancers. Processed meat is even more dangerous, they say.

According to The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation, the production of red meat releases 18% of all the world's greenhouse gas emissions, more than for any other type of food. We are talking about 14% of global methane emissions and a carbon footprint of 16 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per tonne of beef and lamb.

Factory farming concentrates enormous numbers of animals in a small space. This has resulted in the outbreak of serious global diseases or pandemics such as Mad Cow Disease. This year saw the outbreak of swine flu at a Smithfield Meats factory farm in Perote, Mexico. The disease spread around the planet very quickly.

Another consequence of concentrating animals in a small area is the need to grow feed crops. Farms stop producing food for humans and in Brazil it results in deforestation. Pesticides and fertilizers enter into the food chain along with sedatives, growth hormones and antibiotics which are used on the animals. As a result, animal waste sends phosphates, nitrates, ammonia and copper into surrounding water systems, killing fish populations and threatening public health. The antibiotics used make dangerous diseases more resistant to treatment. The U.S. Department of Agriculture says nearly half of America's water supply and 80% of its agricultural land is used to grow animal feed. This feed then typically travels large distances to reach the animals.

So, what can we do to reduce the environmental impact of what we eat? Use consumer power to lower your carbon footprint and improve your health at the same time. Cut down on red meat and cut out processed meat. These actions will give you the budget to buy locally produced organic meat. Apply the same principal to dairy products. If you don't live in the tropics, don't buy tropical fruit. Buy in season from your region. President Obama and his family follow the ideas of Michael Pollan. "Eat food, not too much. Mostly plants." This means checking ingredients. Real bread contains flour, salt, yeast and water, nothing else. Food additives are all about profit. And try to eat at the lower end of the food chain. Following these guidelines will reduce your personal carbon footprint by 20%. Not bad.

I have not mentioned the ethical questions of modern farming methods. I will leave that to the words of others.

Wendell Berry: "The industrial farm is said to have been modelled on the factory production line. In practice, it looks more like a concentration camp."

Pythagoras: "As long as men kill animals, they will kill each other."

Leonardo da Vinci: "The time will come when people will see the killing of animals as murder."

Albert Einstein: "Nothing will benefit human health and increase the chances of survival of life on earth as much as the evolution to a vegetarian diet."

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