

GO GREEN, GO VEGAN!

There has been a lot of talk lately about “going green” and reducing your ecological footprint. Many environmentalists suggest switching to compact florescent lights, taking shorter showers, and driving a hybrid car. While these things do help, the environmental benefits of these actions pale in comparison to the good done by going vegan—eliminating your consumption of meat, eggs, and dairy products—the single best thing you can do to protect our environment and reduce pollution.

Raising animals for food—whether it is for their flesh, milk, or eggs; even organic and free-range—is an assault on the Earth and an inefficient use of resources.

Global Warming and Air Pollution:

A 2006 report by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations (UN) concludes that animal agriculture contributes more greenhouse gases to the atmosphere than all the cars, trucks, planes, and ships in the world combined. Researchers at the University of Chicago have determined that just going vegetarian is more effective in reducing global warming than driving a hybrid car. The FAO concludes: “the livestock sector...generates 65 percent of human-related nitrous oxide, which has 296 times the Global Warming Potential (GWP) of CO₂. Most of this comes from manure. And it accounts for respectively 37 percent of all human-induced methane (23 times as warming as CO₂), which is largely produced by the digestive system of ruminants, and 64 percent of ammonia, which contributes significantly to acid rain.” The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reports that animal waste is responsible for 80 percent of ammonia emissions in the United States. On factory farms it’s not just the animals who suffer from respiratory infections caused by the ammonia; according to the University of Iowa, 70 percent of workers on animal factory farms are afflicted with acute bronchitis.

Water Pollution:

According to the Audubon Society, over half of the water used in the US goes to raising animals for food. The EPA reports that waste from meat, egg, and dairy farms pollutes more water sources than all other industries combined. According to a US Senate Committee on Agriculture, farmed animals produce 130 times more urine and feces than the human population of the US—all without the benefit of a sewage system. This manure—more than 500 million tons of animal waste annually, according to the EPA—far exceeds what can be used for fertilizer. As a result, huge open-air lagoons of liquefied waste collect alongside animal farms. This often seeps into the groundwater or overflows in times of heavy rainfall, polluting lakes, rivers, and other waterways. Agricultural runoff has caused a 7,700 square mile “dead zone” in the Gulf of Mexico where the Mississippi River flows into it. The Sierra Club reports, “America’s drinking water, rivers, and lakes are at risk from factory farms... waste leaks into our rivers and streams, fouling our air, contaminating our drinking water, and spreading disease.” According to the FAO, “The livestock business is among the most damaging sectors to the earth’s increasingly scarce water resources, contributing among other things to water pollution, eutrophication [algae blooms causing oxygen depletion], and the degeneration of coral reefs. The major polluting agents are animal wastes, antibiotics and hormones, chemicals from [leather] tanneries, fertilizers, and the pesticides used to spray feed crops. Widespread overgrazing disturbs water cycles, reducing replenishment of above and below ground water resources.”

Land Use and Food Waste:

According to a US Department of Agriculture (USDA) statistical bulletin, 80 percent of the agricultural land in the US is used to raise animals. Time Magazine reports that we feed 70% of the grains and cereals grown in the US to farmed animals. This is very inefficient because most of the feed gets wasted and only a small amount of the protein is converted to flesh. The FAO reports that farmed animals now use 30 percent of the Earth’s entire land surface—mostly permanent pasture, but also including 33 percent of the global arable land, which is used to produce feed. The University of Chicago notes that raising animals for food requires ten times as many crops as we’d need if we just ate the grains directly. If we were not using all that land to grow crops to fatten chickens, pigs, and cows, we could reforest millions of acres in the US alone. Or, we could use the surplus grains to feed all the starving people in the world many times over.

Rainforest Destruction:

According to scientists at the Smithsonian Institute, the equivalent of *seven football fields of land is bulldozed every minute* to create more room for farmed animals. Once the rainforest canopy is gone, the soil has nothing to hold it in place. Tropical rains, combined with the hoofs of animals, quickly erode the topsoil. With the topsoil eroded, nothing but hardpan remains. The forests are unable to grow back and the land is left arid and lifeless. The FAO report states, “As forests are cleared to create new pastures, it is a major driver of deforestation, especially in Latin America where, for example, some 70 percent of former forests in the Amazon have been turned over to grazing.”

Extinction:

The USDA reports that, in the US, grazing has contributed to the demise of 26% of federal threatened and endangered species. According to the UN, ranching-induced deforestation is one of the main reasons for the loss of plant and animal species in tropical forests.

Wildlife:

The USDA’s Wildlife Services (WS), formerly called Animal Damage Control, is a taxpayer-funded government program that targets predatory and “nuisance” wildlife that are thought to kill livestock, eat grain, or otherwise reduce ranchers’ and farmers’ profits. In 2006, WS reported killing 1,642,823 animals at taxpayer expense. WS methods of killing are shockingly indiscriminate and inhumane. Aerial gunning, poisoning, and steel-jawed leg hold traps kill animals that may have never jeopardized farms, including pups and cubs, endangered species, and pets that are attracted to bait. Sodium fluoroacetate, also known as compound 1080, is a common poison used by WS. Compound 1080 is a highly toxic, slow-acting poison that causes immense suffering in its victims. WS reports that death “occurs in two to five hours or more” and “may result from gradual cardiac failure; progressive depression of the central nervous system with either cardiac or respiratory failure as the terminal event; or respiratory arrest following severe convulsions.” This suffering and death of wildlife is completely unnecessary and is done to directly benefit the animal agriculture industry.

Fishing and Fish Farms:

Commercial fishing, aquaculture, and angling are environmentally catastrophic. Monofilament line and lead weights used by anglers pollute lakes, rivers, and oceans and often entangle birds and other wildlife. Drift nets are wiping out biodiversity, as miles of nets sweep up all the fish in their path, and often damage delicate coral reefs. Commercial fishers have devastated the ocean’s ecosystem to the extent that large fish populations are only 10 percent of what they were in the 1950s. Industrial fishing results in enormous “by-catch”—non-target animals caught (and usually killed), but tossed overboard and not counted in a ship’s quota. By-catch can range from 50% of the catch in long-line fishing to as high as 90% of the catch in drift-netting. The shrimp industry’s use of purse seine nets is a leading cause of worldwide decline in sea turtle populations.

Fish farms are no better for the environment. The fish on ocean-based farms are plagued by parasites and diseases, which they pass to wild fish living near the farms. When farmed fish escape from their underwater cages, they threaten the well-being of native fish species. Fish farms pollute coastal waters with massive amounts of fish feces and require huge numbers of wild-caught fish to feed their captives. Rosamond Naylor, Senior Research Scholar at the Institute for International Studies at Stanford University, reports that it takes about three pounds of wild-caught fish to grow one pound of farmed shrimp or salmon. She also says fish farming often produces a flow of effluent, containing feces and uneaten feed, which contributes to pollution of coastal waters. Additionally, hundreds of thousands of acres of coastal wetlands have been destroyed for aquaculture ponds and facilities.

The research is in and the facts are undeniable. If you care about the Earth, and want to be a true environmentalist with the smallest possible ecological footprint, you must be vegan.



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