

# Is Eating Meat Bad for the Environment?

by Miki Garcia

" Livestock produces more global warming and pollution than all the cars and trucks in the world combined."

While industrial animal production has been linked to countless diseases such as salmonellosis and E. coli 0157, researchers say the current way of raising animals for food is also disastrous for the environment.

According to a report by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), *Livestock's Long Shadow*, livestock production is one of the major causes of the world's most pressing environmental problems, including global warming, land degradation, air and water pollution, and loss of biodiversity.

## **Meat And Global Warming**

According to the FAO report, livestock are responsible for 18 percent of greenhouse gas emissions, a bigger share than that of transport. Feed production (chemical fertilizer production, deforestation for pasture and feed crops, and pasture degradation), animal production (enteric fermentation and nitrous oxide emissions from manure) and the carbon dioxide emitted during processing and transportation of animal products contribute to the problem.

## **Air and Water Pollution**

Animal agriculture is probably the largest source of water pollution, contributing to eutrophication, dead zones in coastal areas, degradation of coral reefs, human health problems, emergence of antibiotic drug resistance and many others, according to the UN report. The major sources of pollution are from animal wastes, antibiotics and hormones, chemicals from tanneries, fertilizers and pesticides used for feed crops, and sediments from eroded pastures.

## **Wasting Resources**

The meat industry is a major cause of fresh water depletion. Ed Ayres of the World Watch Institute, said: “Around the world, as more water is diverted to raising pigs and chickens instead of producing crops for direct consumption, millions of wells are going dry. India, China, North Africa and the U.S. are all running freshwater deficits, pumping more from their aquifers than rain can replenish...Pass up one hamburger, and you’ll save as much water as you save by taking 40 showers with a low-flow nozzle.”

## **Biodiversity Loss**

Countless acres of rainforest have been destroyed to create land for cattle grazing. FAO estimates in the U.S., grazing has contributed to the demise of 26% of federally-listed threatened and endangered species. The situation is worse in South America where ranching-induced deforestation is one of the main reasons for the loss of plant and animal species in tropical rainforests.

In 306 of the 825 terrestrial eco-regions identified by the Worldwide Fund for Nature, livestock are identified as “a current threat”, while 23 of Conservation International’s 35 “global hot spots for biodiversity” – characterized by serious levels of habitat loss – are affected by livestock production.

“The way that we breed animals for food is a threat to the planet. It pollutes our environment while consuming huge amounts of water, grain, petroleum, pesticides and drugs. The results are disastrous,” Dr. David Brubaker, at Johns Hopkins University’s Center for a Livable Future.

***Source: Mercy for Animals, Vegetarian Starter Kit***