



Virginia Messina - Vegan Examiner

Eating meat contributes to global poverty

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Meat production in U.S. contributes to global warming and drought.

Yesterday's Seattle Vegan Examiner column was a little bit of commentary about a proposal for a 50 percent tax on meat. Among the many good reasons for taxing meat—and thereby decreasing its consumption and production—is that America's love affair with animal foods has a harmful impact on the world's poor.

One reader suggested that the article was nothing more than an attack on meat-eaters and had nothing to do with caring about world hunger. It's true that this is a column about veganism, a *lifestyle* that is free of all animal products based on the idea that animals are not ours to use. But there are a number of good reasons for eliminating animal products from the *diet*.

The idea for a meat tax was raised by world-renowned ethicist Peter Singer. Coincidentally, on the same day that his editorial was published, I finished reading his latest book *The Life You Can Save*, which is about what we can do to combat world poverty and hunger. The book is primarily about making charitable contributions, but Dr. Singer also talks a little bit about the ways in which meat eating and American agriculture affect efforts to reduce world hunger.

American farmers who lobby to protect our intensive farming system and who promote consumption of animal foods often proclaim that they feed the world's hungry. In fact, many U.S. farming and giving practices *contribute* to global poverty. For example, the 2 billion dollars worth of U.S. food aid given to poor countries must, by law, be grown in the United States. This



allows U.S. farmers to make money from the food but it also depresses markets in the poorest countries making it far more difficult for local farmers to make a living.

But the bigger problem is that production of animal products allows the world's wealthy omnivores to take more than their share of the available food. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, 756 million tons of grain were fed to food animals in 2007. That's enough to feed every one of the world's 1.4 billion people who live in extreme poverty. And it doesn't include all the protein-rich soybeans used for farm animal feed.

It's not exactly news that most of the grain and soy fed to animals does not produce food. Some of those calories go toward the animals' basic metabolic functions and are used for growth of non-food body parts like bones. As a result, it requires 13 pounds of grain to produce one pound of meat. And that meat, of course, is available only to the world's more affluent people. As the global population grows, we cannot afford that kind of waste.

Production of animal foods also contributes to global warming which will have its worst effects on the world's poorest people. Changes in climate will have devastating effects in countries where more than half of the people—sometimes as much as 90 percent of the population—are subsistence farmers. Natural disasters resulting from climate change will impact the world's poor living in coastal regions.

Several years ago, a report in the British Medical Journal noted that global warming is a direct threat to the fight against poverty. The National Intelligence Council reported that the effects of global warming could actually impact other countries in ways that become a threat to U.S. national security.

It is true that some animal foods are produced more efficiently than others, but none are produced as efficiently as plant proteins. The horrible suffering of farm animals *should* be reason enough for anyone to stop eating—and using—animal products. But it is also relevant for compassionate people to consider the impact of animal food production on the world's 1.4 billion poorest people. Going vegan may not cure all of the world's problems. But eating animal foods definitely makes those problems worse.