

Meat and the Environment

Whether it's overuse of resources, water or air pollution, or soil erosion, raising animals for food is wreaking havoc on the Earth. In fact, raising animals for food requires more water than all other uses of water combined, causes more water pollution than any other activity, and is responsible for 85 percent of U.S. soil erosion. America's meat addiction is steadily poisoning and depleting our land, water, and air.



Many environmental groups, including the National Audubon Society and the Union of Concerned Scientists, have recognized that raising animals for food has a worse effect on the planet than just about anything else we can do.

The most important step you can take to save the planet is to go vegetarian.

There is no such thing as a meat-eating environmentalist!

How Does Eating Meat Affect the Earth?

Today's factory farms leave behind an environmental toll that generations to come will be forced to pay. Whether it's excessive water use or contamination, excessive soil use or erosion, excessive resource use or air pollution, America's meat addiction is steadily poisoning and depleting our water, land, and air.

Consider this:

In an effort to conserve water, you might install a water-saver on your kitchen faucet, saving up to 6,000 gallons of water per year. Most of those savings would be lost if you consumed just one pound of beef (which requires 5,200 gallons of water per pound to produce-compared to only 25 gallons for a pound of wheat). Raising animals for food consumes more than half of all water used in the U.S. A totally vegetarian diet requires 300 gallons of water per day, while a meat-eating diet requires more than 4,200 gallons of water per day.

Producing just one hamburger uses enough fossil fuel to drive a small car 20 miles. Of all raw materials and fossil fuels used in the U.S., more than one-third is used to raise animals for food.

A typical pig factory farm generates raw waste equal to that of a city of 12,000 people. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, factory farms pollute our waterways more than all other industrial sources combined. In December 1997, the Senate Agricultural Committee released a report that stated that animals raised for food produce 130 times as much excrement as the entire human population, roughly 68,000 pounds per second, all without the benefit of waste treatment systems. A Scripps Howard synopsis of the report (April 24, 1998) stated: "It's untreated and unsanitary, bubbling with chemicals and disease-bearing organisms. ... It goes onto the soil and into the water that many people will, ultimately, bathe in, wash their clothes with, and drink. It is poisoning rivers and killing fish and sickening people. ... Catastrophic cases of pollution, sickness, and death are occurring in areas where livestock operations are concentrated. ... Every place where the animal factories have located, neighbors have complained of falling sick." This excrement is also generally believed to be responsible for the "cell from hell," Pfiesteria, a deadly microbe, the discovery of which is detailed in Rodney Barker's *And the Waters Turned to Blood*.

Of all agricultural land in the U.S., 87 percent is used to raise animals for food. That's 45 percent of the total land mass in the U.S. More than 260 million acres of U.S. forest have been cleared to create cropland in order to produce our meat-centered diet.

The meat industry is directly responsible for 85 percent of all soil erosion in the U.S., because so much grain is needed to feed animals being raised for food. In the U.S., animals are fed more than 80 percent of the corn we grow and more than 95 percent of the oats. Raising animals for food is grossly inefficient, because you have to put 20 calories of food into an animal to get just one measly calorie back in the form of flesh. The world's cattle alone consume a quantity of food equal to the caloric needs of 8.7 billion people—more than the entire human population on Earth. According to environmental think-tank Worldwatch Institute, "[T]he easiest way to reduce grain consumption is to lower the intake of meat and milk, grain-intensive foods. Roughly 2 of every 5 tons of grain produced in the world are fed to livestock, poultry, or fish; decreasing consumption of these products, especially of beef, could free up massive quantities of grain and reduce pressure on land."

Each vegetarian saves one acre of trees every year! More than 260 million acres of U.S. forest have been cleared to grow crops to feed animals raised for meat, and another acre of trees disappears every eight seconds. The tropical rain forests are also being destroyed to create grazing land for cattle. Fifty-five square feet of rain forest may be razed to produce just one quarter-pound burger.

Caring for the environment means protecting all of our planet's inhabitants, not just the human ones. Animals suffer extreme pain and deprivation on today's factory farms. Chickens have their beaks sliced off with a hot blade, pigs have their tails chopped off and their teeth removed with pliers, and male cows and pigs are castrated all without anesthesia. The animals are crowded together and dosed with hormones and antibiotics to make them grow so quickly that their hearts and limbs often cannot keep up, causing crippling and heart attacks. Finally, at the slaughterhouse, they are hung upside down and bled to death, often while fully conscious. **What kind of environmentalist can support any of that?**

Source: *People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals*