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Headline: Experts link climate change to animal products consumption

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Better believe it, environment experts claim the weather we have today is partly the result of our appetites. Although the causes of climate change is no doubt multifaceted, livestock propagation to meet the world's incessant appetite for animal products has been assessed to be a significant factor in environmental destruction.

Worldwide greenhouse gas emissions have been attributable to animal products such as cattle, buffalo, sheep, goats, camels, pigs and poultry (chicken). The "Livestock and Climate Change" published in one of the issues of World Watch magazine reported that livestock and their byproducts actually account for at least 32.6 billion tons of carbon dioxide (CO₂) per year, or 51 percent of annual worldwide greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, the prerequisite substance for climate change.

Warning

Climate experts have warned that 2017 will be the last year that the International Energy Agency has estimated for all countries to lower their CO₂ emission. Otherwise, if the target is not met, the rise of global temperature to 2°C by 2050 will be irreversible. US environment correspondent Suzanne Goldenberg recently wrote in The Guardian a study published in Environmental Research Letters, warning that drastic changes in food production and at the dinner table are needed by the year 2050 in order to prevent catastrophic global warming. She wrote that growing feed crops for cattle and pigs produces more GHG emissions than crops that go directly into the human food chain. Eating less meat, she concluded, would reduce demand for fertilizer as well as reduce the amount of manure produced.

Nitrous oxide, released by fertilizers and animal manure, is the most potent of the greenhouse gases that cause climate change. The UN's climate body has called for deep cuts to those emissions. Some scientists are at work growing artificial meat which would avoid using fertilizers and manure. This was cited in The Guardian in April 2012, which said this situation has been "arguably the most difficult challenge in dealing with climate change: how to reduce emissions from food production while still producing enough to feed a global population projected to reach 9 billion by the middle of this century."

The findings, by Eric Davidson, director of the Woods Hole Research Center in Massachusetts, say the developed world will have to cut fertilizer use by 50 percent and persuade consumers in the developed world to stop eating so much meat.

Forbes online, in its April 28, 2012 issue, wrote that the 2006 report estimated that 18 percent of worldwide GHG emissions attributable to cattle, buffalo, sheep, goats, camels, pigs and poultry (chicken) were, in fact, updated to 51 percent, citing an analysis performed by Robert Goodland, a former World Bank Group environmental adviser, with cowriter Jeff Anhang, an environmental specialist at the World Bank Group's International Finance Corp.

Threats to long-term food security

The production system that generates our grain-fed meat diet not only wastes our resources but helps destroy them, cited Frances Moore Lappe in "Diet for a Small Planet." Some facts that threaten our long-term food security are water costs, soil erosion, energy costs and import dependency.

Producing just one pound of steak uses 2,500 gallons of water. To produce a pound of steak, which provides us with 500 calories of food energy, takes 20,000 calories of fossil fuel, expended mainly in producing the crops fed to livestock.

Peter R. Cheeke, professor of animal agriculture at Oregon University, explained: "There can be no dispute that corn and soybean meal are used with more efficiency, and can provide food for more people when they are eaten directly by people rather than being fed to swine or poultry to be converted to pork, chicken meat, or eggs for human consumption."

Surprising environmental cost

Worldwide meat production (beef, chicken, pork and other animal products) emits more atmospheric GHG than do all forms of global transportation or industrial processes. This study ("The Greenhouse hamburger: Producing beef for the table has a surprising environmental cost: it releases prodigious amounts of heat-trapping greenhouse gases"), published in the February 2009 issue of the Scientific American, was written by Nathan Fiala, a doctoral candidate in economics at the University of California, Irvine.

Rajendra Pachauri, chair the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and a Nobel Peace Prize recipient, agrees with Fiala's findings, telling BBC News: "The UN Food and Agriculture Organization has estimated that direct emissions from meat production account for about 18 percent of the world's total greenhouse gas emissions. So I want to highlight the fact that among options for mitigating climate change, changing diets is something one should consider."

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A growing number of Filipinos are now into transition food (gradually shunning animal products). Some have turned to online networking sites such as Facebook's pinoyvegs for vegetarian support group, or have sourced restaurants at www.happycow.net.