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Headline: 97-M Pinoys meatless for 1 meal equal to CO2 intake of 326,227 trees

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If your Earth Day involves only the fossil fuels we burn, the electricity we consume, or the water we use, think again. Saving the Earth might also mean, more than anything else—the food we eat.

Livestock farming accounts for the use and pollution of 70 percent of the global freshwater and 38 percent of land-use conversion. In fact, 70 percent of the Amazon Rain Forest has already been cleared for grazing and feed crop production. It takes about 12,000 liters of water to produce 1 kilogram of beef, compared with just 850 liters to produce the same weight of wheat.

However, recent analysis by Goodland and Anhang, coauthors of “Livestock and Climate Change” in the latest issue of World Watch magazine, found 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 GHG emissions.

One Filipino scientist has been sounding the alarm, and has started his own measures to address the accelerating climate change. Custer Deocaris, a Balik Scientist of the Department of Science and Technology, is the founder and chair of Meatless Monday Philippines which advocates a 100-percent plant-based diet for all Filipinos for at least one day of the week.

Deocaris revealed to Inquirer Health and Science that climatologists have predicted that—if present human activities continue—by 2050 global temperatures will have risen by two to four degrees Celsius, unleashing a catastrophic climate change of a magnitude that would threaten human existence.

“The world needs a paradigm shift. As we approach 2017, the truth will get more inconvenient. You cannot be an environmentalist if you do not wish to cut down on meat or go vegetarian,” Deocaris stressed.

Profound effects

It isn't too late, however. He said that small changes, if replicated 97 million times, could have profound effects globally. He said every Filipino going meatless even for just one lunch would reap the benefits of a future Earth that is not hostile to human existence.

Deocaris computes that one meatless lunch by 97 million Filipinos would have been equivalent to 12,722,851 kg of CO₂ saved (if all protein of the average Filipino diet with meat is replaced by soya during this meatless lunch). This would also be equivalent to the amount of CO₂ saved from 5,399,241 liters of gasoline.

A meatless lunch would also be equivalent to the amount of CO₂ saved when 2,494 cars are taken off the road for one year.

Deocaris also said a meatless lunch would be equivalent to the CO₂ sequestered by 326,227 trees, or the CO₂ prevented from being released from 385,935 LPG tanks.

On top of that, a meatless lunch would've saved 2,365,755 animals from slaughter.

Individual acts count

Lakapati De Guia-Basa, who will be 69 by the time Deocaris predicts catastrophic climate events in 2050 would occur, has embraced a vegan lifestyle, which includes taking in raw food juices, vegetables, fruit smoothies and root crops.

She is on her way to becoming a certified vegan raw food chef. Aside from healing her of Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD), turning to nature's own produce has made Basa realize that it could also be an answer to the food shortages happening around the world.

Bali-certified raw food chef Asha Peri, a Math and Movement teacher in the Philippines who conducts workshops on how to prepare delectable raw food dishes, said: "Raw food is one of the greatest solutions to climate change. We use less electricity, less plastics, less toxic waste. And we are kinder to the soil," she said.

Space technology expert Esteban Godilano, scientist of Climate Change Congress of the Philippines, said that "Our food systems are basically oil based—from production to consumption. This is already recognized by experts, that is why we have the GHG (greenhouse gases) Research Alliance (GRA) to take an accounting of all (GHG production)."

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Godilano also cited the 2006 Food and Agriculture Organization report "Livestock's Long Shadow," which declared that the meat industry has been "one of the top two most significant contributors to the most serious environmental problems, at every scale from local to global."