

Headline: The meat of the matter

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Here's something to chew on: the crucial connection between meat production and climate change. Conscientious vegetarians have long raised a related issue, harping (correctly) on the massive amounts of grain and water needed to maintain commercial livestock farms, and the gas emissions generated in the production of beef, poultry and pork. Now the connection to global warming and climate change is made clearer in World Meat-Free Day, which was marked last June 13.

The idea may sound blasphemous in this country of carnivores, but there's a wealth of information to back this unusual but urgent occasion. World Meat-Free Day began in the United Kingdom last year, the goal being to get people to lay off meat just for a day so they can see the impact of such an act on the environment. "The campaign aims to raise awareness of the benefits of eating less meat and demonstrate how it can result in fairer food systems and better results for our planet," per its website.

It isn't even about going vegetarian full-time, according to the conveners of World Meat-Free Day in the country, which include Bantay Kalikasan, Climate Reality Project Philippines, WWF Philippines, Luntiang Lunes, Slow Food Philippines, Nurturers of the Earth, and Miriam College. "There is no need to entirely give up meat. A 'less but better' approach to food choices and consumption can help save the environment."

The fact is that livestock production is the second leading contributor of noncarbon dioxide emissions, more than by any kind of transportation or industry in the world. What we eat may be killing us in a different way.

This is one of the realities repeatedly cited by Peta (or the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), which is active in the Philippines and Asia. (Peta members tried to mount a protest event during the Apec forum in Manila last November to focus attention on how the treatment of animals impacts climate change, but were headed off by police for lack of a permit. Through campaigner Ashley Fruno, they expressed "shock" that the event was stopped: "All we were doing was advocating kindness and reminding Apec leaders that animal agriculture is a leading cause of climate change.")

And this is a problem with which the world is slowly coming to grips. A total of 171 countries signed the landmark Paris Agreement to reduce emissions to zero in the second half of the century. The Union of Concerned Scientists' director of climate research and analysis, Doug Boucher, writes in the UCS blog: "One encouraging part of the ongoing scientific discussion about how to achieve this ambitious goal is that we're finally starting to take seriously the impact of what people eat. Three recent studies show that it makes a big difference, to the climate as well as to our health. As I've written before—in this blog, in UCS reports and in the scientific journal *Nature Climate Change*—by far the biggest impact of diet on climate comes from eating high on the food chain by consuming lots of meat—but not just any meat. What really makes a difference is the amount of beef."

Inquirer Science and Health's Tessa Salazar has been reporting on the issue, noting that Boucher is but one of many senior scientists who have confirmed the link between eating animals and climate change. "Livestock farming now accounts for the use of 70 percent of the global freshwater and 38 percent of the world's land-use conversion," Salazar writes. "Some 70 percent of the Amazon Rainforest, in fact, has already been cleared for grazing and feed crop production."

Giving up meat doesn't even have to be that difficult. At the Madrid Fusion last April, Salazar spoke with chefs Florabel Co-Yatco and Robby Goco about how delicious vegetarian dishes can sway even the most fervent meat eaters. "I have been thinking of becoming vegetarian myself," Goco said. "I promised myself that when I turn 50, I'm going to be vegan. I know that someday we're going to run out of meat."

Salazar further points out that Filipinos already go meat-free during the yearly commemoration of Holy Week. She adds: "Abstaining from meat 24/7, 365 may actually be a great idea for the planet and our health."

Indeed, Filipinos can make a lifestyle choice and be healthier for it; too, they can be compassionate toward the other animals in Creation—the cattle, swine and chickens that are, like humans, sensate beings that also know fear, anguish and suffering.

The big picture being, in using the "less but better" approach to meat consumption, we can each meet the urgency of pushing back global warming and climate change.

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