

# Our Food, Our Planet

What you place on the end of your fork has profound implications for the environment...

**T**he increased demand for animal products has resulted in a vast re-allocation of resources, has promoted the degradation of global ecosystems and has had a devastating impact on human health. Many of the main environmental issues—desertification, fresh water availability, ocean pollution, biological diversity, rainforest destruction, topsoil erosion and climate change—are directly and severely impacted by the Western world's current animal-based diet with its intensive agriculture.

In the last ten years, extensive medical studies have reported that Westerners are eating a diet containing excessive amounts of protein, saturated fat, cholesterol, pesticides and not enough fibre. This diet is creating spiraling medical costs, killing people and destroying the environment. And is largely responsible for the disappearance of small family farms and the growth of corporate agribusiness.

Environmentally, the export of Western eating habits is similar to the export of toxic chemicals and toxic wastes. With reference to health and medical costs, the effects of this diet are more serious than the effects of cigarettes.

If developed nations were to move towards a more sustainable plant-based diet, and if developing nations recognized the resource they have in their predominantly plant-based diets, this would further development of ecologically-sound agriculture. All nations and regions must look to growing their food locally, honoring the knowledge and value of the men and women who farm. These measures will provide food security, environmentally-sound agriculture, healthy food and rural development.



"Factory" production of livestock.

## Consider these realities...

- ▶ Livestock—cattle, poultry, goats, sheep—totaling 15 billion worldwide now outnumber people 3 to 1. Livestock graze on half of the world's landmass.
- ▶ A steer grazing on an acre of grass will yield just 58 pounds of meat, enough to sustain 1 person for 77 days. But planted with soybeans, that same acre can sustain an individual for 2,200 days.
- ▶ To feed the world's current population, the North American style diet would require 2½ times as much grain as the world's farmers produce for all purposes.
- ▶ According to a 1991 Gov. of Canada study, about 40 kg of manure are produced for each kg of edible beef that is eventually marketed
- ▶ 38% of the world's grain and 70% of North America's grain is fed to livestock.
- ▶ According to an Alberta Agriculture study, meat production on average requires 10-20 times more energy per edible tonne as does grain production.
- ▶ Cattle production is the primary contributing factor in all causes of desertification.
- ▶ Every steak has the same global warming effect as a 25-mile drive in a typical North American car.
- ▶ Some developing nations grow and export grains to feed livestock in Western nations while their own citizens are starving.
- ▶ The majority of chemical fertilizers and pesticides in North America are used on livestock feed grains.
- ▶ 80% of North American meat contains drugs. Meat, poultry and dairy products are the major source of pesticide residues in the Western diet.
- ▶ Livestock production is the largest polluter of water in North America, topping all other industries that produce toxic wastes.
- ▶ 85% of North American topsoil is lost from cropland, pasture, rangeland and forest land due to raising livestock.
- ▶ Globally, an estimated 27 million tons of fish are discarded each year representing a fourth of the total harvest.
- ▶ The number of animals killed for food in the US alone was 9,400 million in 1998 including 41 million cattle and calves, 119 million pigs, 5 million sheep and over 900 million chickens, turkeys and ducks.
- ▶ The average North American man, woman & child subsidizes the abuse and slaughter of over 35 animals per year or 2,600 in a lifetime, including 2,555 chickens & turkeys, 33 pigs and 12 cattle & calves.

## Resource Consumption

Societies observing plant-based diets require far less resources to feed their populations. With few exceptions, land that is growing grain for livestock can be growing grain for humans.

The prevailing diet among Chinese people is high in plant foods and low in meat, poultry and dairy products. Studies of the Chinese population show a remarkably low incidence of the diet-related diseases prevalent among Western cultures. However, when these people migrate to Western nations and adopt the high-fat, high-protein, low fibre diet of Westerners, they incur the same incidence of diet related diseases of affluence as Westerners: heart attacks, strokes, arthritis, breast cancer, prostate cancer, colon cancer, osteoporosis, diabetes, asthma, gallstones, impotence and obesity.

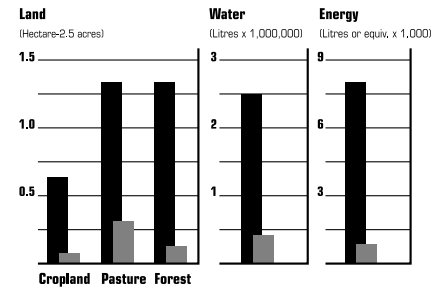
**“When cattle ranchers clear rainforest to raise beef to sell to fast-food chains that make hamburgers to sell to North Americans who have the highest rate of heart disease in the world we can say easily that business is no longer developing the world. We have become its predator.”**

—Paul Hawken, *Author*  
**The Ecology of Commerce**

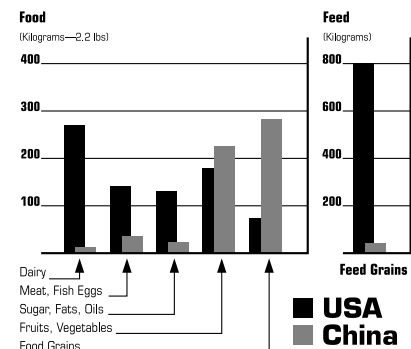
It's becoming increasingly difficult to hide and ignore the colossal environmental impact of animal foods production. Consider these recent findings:

- ▶ The United Nations reports that because of overfishing, all 17 of the world's major fishing areas have reached or exceeded their natural limits.
- ▶ Like fisheries, rangelands almost everywhere are being grazed at or beyond their sustainable yields. Livestock grazing harms roughly 20 percent of all threatened and endangered species in the US.
- ▶ Beef production in Latin America, for both domestic and international markets, fuels the destruction of irreplaceable rainforests. In October 1995, the New York Times reported, “Burnings in the Amazon appear to be approaching the worst levels ever.” Clearing forests to create pasture is a principle cause for the fires.
- ▶ Fertilizers, pesticides and other runoff from American midwestern farms (most of which grow grain for farm animals) have created a massive, lifeless expanse in the Gulf of Mexico. In 1995, this so-called “Dead Zone” reached 40,000 square miles, roughly the size of New Jersey.

## Resources utilized per capital per year in the United States and China to supply basic needs.



## Food and feed grain consumed per capita per year in the United States and China.



Source D. Pimentel and C. W. Hall, eds. *Food and Natural Resources*, Academy Press, San Diego, 1989

**T**he veil is lifting on the ecological perils of a meat-centred diet, making the switch to an environmentally-friendly alternative compelling. Besides being easy, delicious, economical and healthful, a plant-based diet transforms your fork into a powerful tool for environmental protection and restoration.

## Your Actions Make A Difference

- ▶ Reduce the amount of animal products you eat.
- ▶ Buy organically grown food.
- ▶ Join EarthSave Canada—stay informed and help to educate others.
- ▶ Ask your provincial and federal government to:
  - ▷ Require that all food be grown with healthy and environmentally-sound methods.
  - ▷ Require that all animals that are bred for consumption be raised and slaughtered in healthy, humane, sanitary and environmentally-safe ways.
  - ▷ Support worldwide nutritional education that reflects current nutritional knowledge and promotes health through a predominantly plant-based diet.
  - ▷ Be persistent. The cumulative effects of your actions will make a difference.