

All Saints Church Eco-Bulletin 7 : Consuming The Planet

Now, be honest, how often do you eat meat? Every day? A few times a week? Just on special occasions? What about dairy – and eggs? Do you seek out beef or pork that was reared in the UK or choose chicken because you think they're better for the environment? What about fish – do you see that as a more sustainable option?

Here's the problem with meat and most products derived from animals. Unless they ate only grass, or lived an entirely wild life, what they were fed was probably soya, wheat, maize or even palm-oil products, some of which were grown in South America or Asia, where rainforest or other habitats were lost to make way for them.

Experts estimate that for every 100 calories of fodder, you get between 17 and 30 calories in meat – cattle are the worst converters, giving only 5g of protein for every 100g of grain protein they eat, while chickens are the best, managing about 40g (but only 35g for eggs). A planet subsisting entirely on plants could feed a lot more people, and with a population forecast to reach 10bn by 2050, it's said we need to halve our meat consumption just to stand still.

There is growing recognition of the threat to wildlife from intensive meat production, according to Peter Stevenson, of Compassion in World Farming (CIWF). "For years, there was this myth you could cram huge numbers of chickens and pigs into small spaces but the vast amount of arable land you needed to grow the crops [to feed them] was ignored," he says.

EU Countries import so much soya from Brazil every year that it requires 13m ha – an area the size of Greece – to grow it. While vast areas of the Amazon have been cleared to satisfy this demand, more pressure is now placed on Brazil's *cerrado*, a savannah-type habitat that's home to jaguars, maned wolves and giant anteaters. Only 20 per cent of the original 2m km² of *cerrado* remains intact.

The food we eat has a huge impact on nature – but by making better choices, we can reverse the damage

We all need to eat, but the way we feed ourselves today has utterly transformed our planet. More than

a third of all land worldwide is used for agriculture, and that area keeps expanding every day. If you weighed all our farmed cows, pigs and other livestock, they'd be 15 times heavier than all wild mammals on our planet combined.

Food production is responsible for about 60% of global biodiversity loss and around a third of all greenhouse gas emissions. It's the number-one cause of deforestation and habitat loss worldwide. Agriculture puts a huge strain on freshwater ecosystems, while overfishing threatens life in our oceans. From declining soil fertility to the loss

of bees and other pollinators, our food system is destroying the natural world that it – and we – ultimately depend on.

But it's possible to provide enough nutritious food for everyone, even with a growing global population. And we can do it in a way that doesn't damage our planet, and even helps nature to recover.

Eating less (and more sustainable) meat and dairy is the most important change any of us can make, as plant-based meals generally have a lower environmental impact and are healthier. Reducing food waste would also make a massive difference – today, about a third of all food produced worldwide goes uneaten.

And across the world, pioneering farmers and fishers are demonstrating ways to produce food in harmony with nature.

With your support, we can improve the world's food – without eating the planet.

DO ONE THING!

Eat plant-rich
Try a plant-based menu three days a week. Find inspiring ideas at www.org.uk/recipes

EXPERTS SAY RISING MEAT CONSUMPTION IS THE BIGGEST FACTOR IMPACTING WILDLIFE. BUT ARE CONSERVATIONISTS DOING ENOUGH TO HIGHLIGHT THE HARM CAUSED BY OUR APPETITE FOR BEEF, PORK AND CHICKEN, ASKS

WORLD POPULATION

- 8 billion in Nov 2022.
- Predicted to rise to 10 billion by 2025.
- A 25% increase.

WASTED FOOD

931 billion tonnes worldwide per annum

61% from households
26% from food service
13% from retail

EAT FLEXITARIAN

There's no denying that the lowest carbon diet is a vegan one, but for some of us making the move to 100% vegan seems a real challenge.

However, simply adopting a more plant-based "flexitarian" diet could reduce greenhouse gas emissions by as much as 52%.* Many people start by doing meat-free Mondays, or by making simple substitutions such as choosing vegetarian or vegan dishes for some meals.

PEOPLE HAVE BEEN TRYING TO SAVE HABITATS FOR DECADES, BUT THE RATE OF DAMAGE GOES ON."

Jonathon Porritt