

HELPING THE PLANET BY CHANGING YOUR DIET

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In recent years, there has been an explosion of plant-based meat and dairy substitutes on grocery store shelves and in restaurants. The companies who make these products, including big names like Impossible and Beyond, are seeking to make affordable substitutes that taste as close to the real thing as possible. While there are many benefits to these kinds of plant-based substitutes, including important health benefits, one of the potential benefits that is essential as it

important to this argument that the elements of climate change that American citizens pointed out as most significant are air and water quality, as these are two of the areas that animal agriculture has impacted the most.

Even though the majority of people do see the real danger created by climate change, the Pew Research Center survey indicates that most people do not associate animal agriculture with climate change. On a question that asks about whether eating less meat might help the climate, only about a quarter of people surveyed believed that it can have a significant impact on climate change. However, 41% (t)-ha ahhipocamei

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Food and Water Watch is a non-profit organization in Washington D.C. that advocates for accountability from the U.S. government and industries within the U.S. about their burden on the climate. In 2018, they published a fact sheet that details the impact factory farming has on greenhouse emissions. They say that “livestock production is responsible for 14.5% of all human sources of greenhouse gases. The greatest contribution to these emissions comes from producing and processing animal feed (45%)”.⁴ The other 55% of emissions from livestock is methane emissions from the digestive processes of cows and manure storage and processing.⁵ These numbers are staggering, and while cattle is by far the highest contributor, they caution that it would not be enough to propose a solution such as eating more chicken as opposed to cattle, as poultry farms “create the same problems with air and water pollution as other types of factory farms while relying on large quantities of corn and soy as feed”.⁶ This all means that the reliance of developed nations like the U.S. on factory farming has significant consequences for the health of the entire planet, and the solutions must go beyond shifting to different types of animal agriculture.

Beyond greenhouse emissions, however, are the damaging effects on water supplies that are created by animal agriculture. Brian Henning, a professor and ethicist, writes that when governments and organizations discuss the reason for water shortages and damaged water quality, that they are often overlooking animal agriculture as a major culprit. He says, “what many often neglect is the key role that agriculture, and livestock in particular, play in both the

⁴ Food and Water Watch. “Factory Farms and Climate Change: Fact Sheet,” Food and Water Watch, June 2018, <https://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/insight/factory-farms-and-climate-change>.

⁵ Food and Water Watch.

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depletion and degradation of freshwater supplies”.⁷ In addition, it is apparent that the amount of

feces – periodically reduced by spraying excess liquid onto crop fields”,¹⁰ and these waste pits often flood when threatened by severe weather. As severe weather and hurricanes increase due to climate change, so too does the impact of animal agriculture on the communities and climate of these areas.

These statistics prove how big of a problem this is, but it also proves how big an industry animal agriculture is in the United States. The people who believe that a single person consuming less meat is not going to change much have a point that is difficult to ignore; however, many people choosing to eat less meat would likely have a marked effect on the need for new factory farms to be developed. Yet the environmental benefits of plant-based products, particularly when contrasted with the damage created by factory farms specifically and animal agriculture generally is impossible to ignore.

¹⁰ Ouzts.

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