

## *How to be Really Green*

You've changed your car for a less polluting one, all your light bulbs are low energy ones, you use green electricity, you avoid air travel, your house is fully insulated, you pay carbon offsets. You probably think you've done all you reasonably can to reduce global warming. Well, as I expect you've guessed, you're wrong.

If you want to be *really* green, then become a vegetarian. By switching to a vegetarian diet you could reduce your carbon footprint by about 1.5 tonnes, or 15% of the average UK footprint. What's more, cutting carbon dioxide emissions, as you've done by taking those measures, is only part of the story.

Consider the following facts:

- Carbon dioxide is not the only contributor to climate change. Methane, for example, has 23 times the global warming impact of CO<sub>2</sub>, and nitrous oxide is almost 300 times as damaging to the climate. Emissions of both are primarily caused by agriculture. A single cow can produce as much as 500 litres of methane per day, and 65% of the total quantity of nitrous oxide produced by human activity comes from livestock (mostly from their manure).
- Farmed animals produce more greenhouse gas emissions (18%) than the world's entire transport system (13.5%). As well as the flatulence and manure produced by farmed animals, they need fertilisers to grow the crops they feed on, factories to produce industrial feed, and transport of the animals and their carcasses across the world. All those generate gaseous emissions.

It's not just the climate that's affected, either, but the environment more generally. Recent studies estimate that an affluent diet containing meat requires as much as three times as many resources as a vegetarian diet:

- Rearing animals for meat contributes significantly to water pollution. Animal waste, antibiotics and hormones enter the water cycle alongside chemicals from tanneries, fertilisers and the pesticides used to spray feed crops.
- Food manufacture is one of the most water-intensive activities in the world and it takes far less water to produce plants than meat. The water required to produce a kilo of beef is a minimum of 13,000 litres; the water required to produce a kilo of wheat is a maximum of 2,000 litres.
- Cattle require approximately 7 kg of grain in order to generate 1 kg of beef, and pigs require 4 kg of grain for 1 kg of pork, so it's a very inefficient way of producing food. It has been calculated that someone living on a vegetarian diet in the UK requires less than half the area of land to grow their food that someone following a meat diet does.

As countries become richer, so their populations turn to a meat-based diet, further increasing the environmental impact of meat production. This leads to more intensive rearing in factory farms, with even more pollution.

Powerful though the environmental arguments are, there are more fundamental reasons for changing our lifestyle. A recent poll of vegetarians found that only 10% became vegetarians because of their concerns for the environment, whereas two-thirds gave up meat either because of moral or spiritual objections to killing animals, or because they object to the way animals are treated and killed for food. These arguments must surely appeal to Christians. Animals are God's creatures just as we are. Few of us would now maintain that animals are on earth merely for Man's use, as was once believed. We have a greater understanding of animals' intelligence and their capacity for suffering. The practices of intensive farming must surely be as abhorrent to thinking Christians as human slavery. We can live healthy (healthier, even) lives without eating meat, so how can we justify the distress of animals and poultry by insisting on having it? Whatever your reasons for giving up meat, you will benefit from a clear conscience, as well as lower risk of heart disease, diabetes, and certain cancers.

Of course, as in everything, there are compromises to be made. You won't see me in rope sandals and my suits are still made of wool. And I know that not all pasture land could grow crops (though with global warming more of it will). Just as changing your light-bulbs and your car aren't going to stop climate change on their own, in the same way, there's no need to become a vegetarian all in one fell swoop. If you prefer, just give up meat gradually. You will be better for it, and so will the planet.

Roger Davis

*For more information and a lot of help in becoming vegetarian, see [www.vegsoc.org](http://www.vegsoc.org).*

