

MEAT AND THE MODERN WORLD

By Louis Breckon

Food. All throughout human history, food has been a focus point to our lives. Far more than just keeping us alive, food is a way of expressing our culture and beliefs, food is the centre of human interaction and socialization. But food today is extremely problematic. And at the centre of this problem is meat and animal agriculture. Over time, we have evolved from creatures who simply hunt the animals of our local environment to keep us alive, to raising and slaughtering them on a massive industrial scale. And it simply isn't feasible to continue like this any longer.

Despite the more obvious, very frequently discussed issue of animal cruelty, which is undoubtedly a very big problem, the biggest and much less frequently discussed issue of animal agriculture's impact on the environment. There is more to climate change than driving cars. Raising Animals for food alone is responsible for 30% of the global water consumption, 45% of the planet's land, and is responsible for 95% of the Amazon Rainforest's destruction, as well as it also being a leading cause of Ocean Dead Zones, habitat destruction and species extinction. The extent of our habitat destruction and agriculture industry is so great that Wild animals make up only 2% of the entire earth's biomass. According to Dr Richard Oppenlander, environmental researcher and author: By my calculations Without using any gas, oil or fuel every again from this day forward we would still exceed our maximum carbon equivalent greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2030 even without factoring in the without factoring in the electricity or energy sector, All simply by raising and eating livestock.

In addition to the awful impacts that animal agriculture has in contributing to climate change, it also takes up an enormous amount of water. Domestic water use makes up 5% of title global water use, compared to the 55% for animal agriculture. Additionally, on average, it takes about 2,500 gallons of water to produce just 1 pound of beef! Moreover, the United states alone, raising livestock has consumed 34 trillion US Dollars worth of water. For reference, that is about 272 trillion glasses of healthy drinking water. In a world where nearly 500 million people do not have access to clean healthy drinking water, this is clearly not a practice that we can continue.

Now it seems as though these statistics are obvious, hard facts, but statistics do not work in that way. There is a whole spectrum of varying statistics that all portray the same thing, but in different ways. It all depends upon what information and context you are taking into account, and in my opinion, in this scenario, we choose to see the statistics that benefit us and our lifestyles. Because meat is such an integral part of our lives, we choose not to see the information that focuses on how much of a difference giving up meat could make, and instead see the information that suits us, the easy lifestyle adjustments we can make to feel good about ourselves and how we are improving our impact on the environment. For example, the issue of the terrible impact that the palm oil industry has on deforestation is something we do hear about a lot, and this is a very severe issue that we definitely need to address however whilst about 21 million acres of rainforest are taken down for the palm oil industry ever year, the meat industry takes down 175 million acres, drastically more.

Despite the fact that animal agriculture is the most significant factor of environmental harm, the issue of plant agriculture is massive, and should not be undermined. Agriculture is the leading source of pollution world wide. Pesticides, fertilizers and other toxic farm chemicals can poison fresh water, marine ecosystems, air and soil. They also can remain in the environment for generations. Just Plant

Agriculture is said to be responsible for over one quarter of harmful greenhouse gas emissions, and this is due to three main reasons. The harmful chemicals used mostly as pesticides and fertilizers, and how they are produced, the amount of land it requires to grow crops and the subsequent deforestation and habitat destruction that has taken place for this reason, and then slightly less directly the process of transporting and processing the food products to the market. Some sources would even go as far as to say that the environmental damage that the packaging and selling of these products are the fault of the agriculture industry, however, in my opinion, that is a different problem.

What makes these statistics so atrocious, is that it is done on an unnecessarily colossal scale, as 67% of all the food we grow is used just to feed the animals that we farm, an amount which is enough to feed 152% of the entire population of the world, and yet it is instead poured into the meat industry. This evidence clearly implies that we by no means need to be producing the amount of food that we do, and we can definitely find far more efficient and environmentally friendly ways to grow that food, as well as being another clear indicator of what makes the meat industry so awful.

To conclude, agriculture on the whole, but more specifically animal agriculture, have awful and devastating impacts on the planet. The single biggest impact that an individual can make on the environment, far more than all other domestic lifestyle changes, put together, is to give up eating meat.

One study by the World Bank Group, using the global standards of measuring Greenhouse Gases, found that 51% of human caused climate change is due to just the Animal Agriculture Industry, if you are taking the loss of carbon sinks, respiration and methane emissions into account. In addition, a report stated that "as much as 23% of global greenhouse gas emissions are as a result of crop production agriculture". This means that in theory as much as 74% of all global greenhouse emissions are down to the agriculture industry. Now this is the combination of two different studies taking different things into account so is not a reliable singular piece of data. I should also add that much of the statistics that we see today are about carbon dioxide emissions alone, whereas this accounts for many different types of greenhouse gas. However, this is quite significantly different to what many other statistics would state, which just goes to show how data and statistics are not hard facts, but versatile and adaptable depending on how they are exhibited.