

The Antidote for Animal Agriculture's Devastation

By adopting a vegan diet, millions of people around the globe could avoid dying from food-related causes, while the likelihood of meeting the targets of the greenhouse-gas emission goals set forth by the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement would greatly increase. The evidence is indisputable: Some of the policies with the greatest environmental and health impact would guide food choices and provide incentives for eating foods rich in plant nutrients (including protein), such as grains, legumes, and nuts. Please consider the following:

- **Animal agriculture takes a devastating toll on the environment.** The United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that animal agriculture is responsible for as much as 18 percent of greenhouse-gas emissions worldwide. To put that in context, producing just over 2 pounds of beef results in more greenhouse-gas emissions than driving a car for three hours.

A University of Oxford study concluded that individuals who switch to healthy, eco-friendly vegan foods can reduce their carbon footprint by up to 73 percent. It's estimated that if people in the U.S. opted to eat beans instead of beef, it could propel the country *more than halfway* to the greenhouse-gas reduction goals set by the Obama administration.

- **The United Nations has concluded that a global shift toward vegan eating is necessary to combat the worst effects of climate change.** In a [2006 report](#) on animal agriculture's environmental impact, the U.N. noted that it's "one of the top two or three most significant contributors to the most serious environmental problems, at every scale from local to global."
- **Meat production is an environmental-justice issue.** Data from an [Environmental Working Group report](#) reveals that the highest density of concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) in North Carolina exist in low-income communities of color. A recent [Duke University research report](#) found that residents in counties with large concentrations of pig farms had significantly more incidents of disease and chronic health conditions than those in other poor communities elsewhere in North Carolina did. The foul-smelling manure lagoons from these operations drastically diminish quality of life for at-risk communities, which often lack the political and legal clout to protect themselves from large corporate producers.
- **The meat, egg, and dairy industries use political influence to push their products at the heavy cost of human and environmental health, even though experts are calling for sweeping shifts to plant-based eating.** In 2014, the meat and livestock industries contributed roughly \$17.7 million to lobbying and political campaigns, and members of the U.S. Department of Agriculture—who are charged with both regulating *and* promoting these industries—have received money from animal agriculture. Despite copious evidence that meat consumption is linked to an increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and cancer, pressure from these industries leads to pro-meat biases in our dietary guidelines, federally assisted school meal programs, and government subsidies.

The EAT-*Lancet* Commission's new reports—"[The Global Syndemic of Obesity, Undernutrition, and Climate Change](#)" and "[Food in the Anthropocene: The EAT-*Lancet* Commission on Healthy Diets From Sustainable Food Systems](#)"—reveal that the same giant industries producing nutrient-poor foods are destroying the nation's health and environment and that a "planetary health diet" is one that slashes consumption of animal-derived foods and embraces vegan proteins. *Lancet* estimates that "changes in food production practices could reduce agricultural greenhouse gas emissions in 2050 by 10 percent, whereas increased consumption of plant-based diets could reduce emissions by 80 percent."