

Moving Toward a Plant-Based Diet

Why we care

Did you know that the food choices we make can have as much impact on the environment as our transportation choices? If all Americans chose a vegetarian diet, the environmental impact would be equivalent to removing 57 million cars from the road. Globally, livestock are responsible for nearly 15% of greenhouse gas emissions. This includes carbon dioxide from raising feed crops and clearing forests, methane from cows and manure, and nitrous oxide from fertilizers. See [greenhouse gases per gram of protein chart](#).

Vast acreages of corn and soybeans are produced in the U.S. to feed animals, resulting in 250% as much land required to supply a meat-based diet compared to a vegetarian diet. And the more corn and soybeans grown for animals, the more water and chemicals are used. Beef is by far the most water and land intensive. Animal waste also has significant impacts. In the Gulf of Mexico, animal waste has contributed to a “dead zone” with not enough oxygen to support aquatic life.

Simple, positive steps

- Switch from beef to chicken to dramatically reduce your environmental impact.
- Reduce portions of meat: consider meat a condiment and include small amounts in stir-fries, casseroles, and sauces.
- Try a meatless dinner a few times each week substituting whole grains, dry beans, nuts, seeds, and dairy products. See www.nwveg.org, *The New Moosewood Cookbook*, or *Quick Vegetarian Pleasures*.
- Order the vegetarian or vegan choices at restaurants to see what you like.
- To learn more about getting adequate nutrition from plant food, see www.vrg.org/nutrition.

Questions or feedback? Contact Jeanne Roy at jeanne@ecoschoolnetwork.org.