

YOUR FOOD, YOUR CHOICE

Coal-burning power plants and pollution from cars are among the most commonly cited sources of greenhouse gas emissions. But experts also point to another source: our diet. The solution, says the head of the UN's Nobel Prize-winning International Panel on Climate Change, may surprise you: Eat less meat.

How can food choices hurt or help the planet? Dietary choices have a great impact on the environment. In the United States, livestock production requires huge quantities of land, water, and petroleum for the fuel, fertilizer, and pesticides needed to grow crops to feed the livestock. In fact, most corn, soybeans, and grains grown in the U.S. are either fed to animals or turned into fuel.

Is feeding staple crops to animals an efficient way to produce food? According to ecologist David Pimentel of Cornell University, nearly 800 million people could be fed with the grain currently fed to U.S. livestock. That's food for thought!

"Green" Eggs & Ham?

Just as citizens have lobbied to reduce packaging and adopt biodegradable containers, they are also pushing for ways to have their meat while lightening the environmental footprint of livestock production. Groups like the American Grassfed Association, which was founded in 2003 and now represents 400 producers across the United States, are spreading the word on practices, such as intensive "rotational grazing," that are environmentally healthier alternatives to factory-style feedlots. Their aim is less soil erosion, less pollution, and a decrease in the use of fossil fuel. "When consumers ask for grass-fed meat, ranchers respond," says Carrie Balkcom, executive director of the AGA. "We know that animals raised entirely on pasture are better for the environment than the big concentrated animal feeding operations. Grassfed meat has a lighter environmental impact."

