

“Simplistic ‘don’t eat meat’ messages risk doing more harm than good”

Richard Young (Soil Association writing in the Ecologist 2008)

“A vegan driving a 4X4 does less damage to the planet than a meat eater on a bicycle”

Caroline Lucas Green MEP

### Three things you can do:

**Eat less meat and dairy-** This one is simple. Unless you’re meat and dairy free already, it wouldn’t hurt to eat a little less.

**Eat more fruit and vegetables -** Good for your health and the environment.

**Eat local and organic produce -** Whether you’re a vegetarian, a dedicated carnivore, or somewhere in between, you can help by purchasing local produce in season. Think about the whole food chain (where did the feed come from for example).

*The debate can be thought about as a scale with mass over-consumption of meat at one end and a meat and dairy free life at the other. There is an ethical maze in between.*



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## Omnivore or Vegetarian?



## IS IT REALLY THAT SIMPLE



An introduction to the environmental consequences of livestock production

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# Livestock production and the environment

Choices we make around meat consumption go far beyond the common misconception that it is simply an ethical decision about killing an animal. Livestock production has severe repercussions in terms of climate change, oil use, water use, deforestation.

## Climate Change

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Livestock production contributes as much as 18% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. That is 64% of all nitrous oxide, 37% of all methane and 9% of all carbon dioxide. To put this into context, the production of a kg of beef generates approximately the same GHG emissions as driving 250 km. There are also a number of hidden GHG emissions in meat production:

- Fertilizer and grain production
- Forest clearing for cattle ranching
- Extensive use of machinery

Although a small amount of meat consumption could be justified and might even be beneficial for climate change, the current volume and methods that are used are far from sustainable. A significant reduction in the industrialized world's meat and dairy consumption is desperately needed.

## Resource Depletion

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Livestock production is an energy-intensive process that is eating into our natural resources.

### Deforestation:

In the last ten years an area the size of Greece has been cleared in the Amazon due to cattle ranching and feed crop production. That's 19,368 km<sup>2</sup> per year. Brazil has recently stated it hopes to double the size of its cattle industry. The Brazilian government does not see this as contradictory to their commitments to tackle climate change.

### Oil:

Modern agriculture is dependent on oil to feed our crop production, through fertilizers and machinery, transport of goods and packaging.

Without the intensive production of grain, our current farming methods would cease to exist. The future of intensive meat production is linked inextricably to an intensive mode of agriculture based on cheap oil. In an age of peak oil, how much longer can we justify using cheap oil to produce vast quantities of grain and meat?

### Water:

Livestock production consumes large quantities of water. For every litre of milk produced, we use 990 litres of water in the production process. This rises to over 15,000 litres for a kg of beef.

Intensive farming methods are also responsible for pollution of water sources. Animal waste, antibiotics and hormones, chemicals from tanneries, fertilizer and pesticide use and sediment from eroded pastures all find their way into rivers and streams. Both nitrogen and phosphorus excreted by animals increase the chance of there being too many nutrients in water (eutrophication) which can lead to algal blooms. This problem can be exacerbated by the use of nitrogen fertilizers.

## Three steps for policy makers

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Individuals need to act to tackle this problem but we also need to see leadership from governments. Leaders should:

- Commit to a reduction of meat and dairy products in line with GHG emission reductions.
- Provide a fund for developing countries such as Brazil to ensure that zero deforestation is reached by 2015.
- Produce a clear education campaign highlighting the *full* impact of livestock production to enable consumers to make informed decisions.

All references can be found in the QCEA briefing paper available at <http://www.quaker.org/qcea/>