

Does Eating Less Meat Help the Environment?

Student's Name

Institution of Learning

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Concerns for the impact of global warming have caused people to seek methods for preventing its adverse effects. A growing number of people have turned to veganism or the reduction of meat consumption as a solution to the problem. However, this choice is met with both sufficient and insufficient controversies. Eating less meat can benefit the environment because animal agriculture is one of the most significant environmental polluters; however, all factors that influence the environment are interconnected, and the reduction of meat consumption cannot be seen as the sole solution for environmental issues.

The main reason for the promotion of decreasing meat consumption as a beneficiary step for environmental protection is attributed to the belief that animal agriculture is responsible for more greenhouse gas emissions than all transportation combined ("Meat and the Environment | PETA," 2018). Mostly, greenhouse emissions are attributed to methane produced by animals from farms as the result of their life activity ("Meat and the Environment | PETA," 2018). Due to the fact that methane actively absorbs heat, it is a more dangerous gas in the atmosphere than carbon dioxide. In the United States alone, animals produce more than 500 million tons of manure annually ("Meat and the Environment | PETA," 2018). Most of this dangerous gas is stored near animal farms, where it finds its way into local rivers and lakes.

Meat farming is also linked to the insufficient use of land, as around 30 percent of land in the world is used for either factory farming or growing crops to sustain animal agriculture ("Meat and the Environment | PETA," 2018). Producing one pound of meat requires between five to ten pounds of grains. Compared to almost sixty million acres employed for growing plants for factory animals, plants produced to feed people occupy an astonishing 4 million acres of land ("Meat and the Environment | PETA," 2018). What is more, the destruction of more than 90

percent of Amazon rainforests is the result of animal agriculture ("Meat and the Environment | PETA," 2018).

Another environmental problem that is directly related to the meat industry is water scarcity. According to contemporary statistics, around 700 million people around the world are living under the condition of water scarcity (Pereira, Cordery & Iacovides, 2009). By 2025, the number is expected to increase to 1.5 billion people suffering from absolute water scarcity (Pereira, Cordery & Iacovides, 2009). At the same time, around 1.8 billion people will have to deal with water-stressed conditions.

The production of meat is said to take anywhere between 1320 gallons to 5300 gallons of water to produce depending on the type of meat and industry-related factors that influence the production. The most water-draining types of meat are pork and beef. In addition, a pound of cheese is produced with 900 gallons of water, and 1000 gallons of water are used to generate a gallon of milk ("Meat and the Environment | PETA," 2018). To compare, the production of one gallon of wheat requires only 25 gallons of water, and the amount of water used to produce just one pound of pork or beef can be used by a family of four for a week to drink, shower, and cook. Therefore, by reducing meat consumption, every individual makes a small contribution to the solution to the problem of water scarcity.

However, there is an alternative opinion to the reduction of meat consumption and veganism that also preserves the environment. The negative impact of animal agriculture on the environment cannot be ignored, but many people fail to see the bigger picture by narrowly suggesting that a vegan diet is the savior of the environment. In the majority of developed countries, including countries of the EU and the United States, people who decide to follow a vegan diet too often rely on imported products to sustain their diets, which contributes to the

increased carbon dioxide emissions due to the higher demand of food transportation (Henderson, 2018). What is more, it affects the nutrition of the locals from the countries where the foods are produced due to the increase of prices on products such as quinoa and avocados (Henderson, 2018). In addition, the decrease of the demand for meat makes a significant number of farmers who produce grass-fed meat that is not as harmful to the environment as crop-fed meat to shut down their businesses and turn to the bigger, crop-fed format of animal agriculture instead, which is far more harmful to the environment (Henderson, 2018).

To sum up, giving up meat products alone and following a vegan lifestyle is not a decision that will immediately overturn negative impacts on the environment. In fact, it is important to consider the bigger picture when it comes to factors that influence global warming. However, the detrimental impact of methane produced by animal farms and their insufficient land use cannot be ignored, and a vegan diet can serve as a sufficient component of a complex approach to help the environment. A person from a first-world country can make a far more useful contribution by combining veganism with relocalization of food systems, the consumption of products that are readily produced in one's region of residence or imported from areas within a close distance, and the minimization of consumption of imported goods. The prominent role in the reduction of the environmental impact through food consumption belongs to large supermarket chains that should focus on rejecting the centralization of distributing systems.

References

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