

# Meat, dairy, and carbon emissions

This article is adapted from 'Hard to Swallow' by Jonathon Porritt, 'The Guardian', January 4, 2006.

Each of us could make a bigger contribution to reducing emissions of greenhouse gases by becoming a vegan than by converting to an eco-friendly car.

Researchers at the University of Chicago have calculated the relative carbon intensity of a standard vegan diet in comparison to a US-style carnivorous diet, all the way through from production to processing to distribution to cooking and consumption. An average burger man (that is, not the outsize variety) emits the equivalent of 1.5 tonnes more CO<sub>2</sub> every year than the standard vegan. By comparison, were you to trade in your conventional gas-guzzler for a state of the art Prius hybrid, your CO<sub>2</sub> savings would amount to little more than one tonne per year.

The basic rule of thumb is that it takes 2kg of feed to produce every kilogram of chicken, 4kg for pork, and at least 7kg for beef. The more meat we eat, the more grain, soya and other feedstuffs we need. So when we hear that the total global meat demand is expected to grow from 209m tonnes in 1997 to around 327m tonnes in 2020, what we have to hold in our mind is all the extra hectares of land required, all the extra water consumed, the extra energy burned, and the extra chemicals applied to grow the requisite amount of feed to produce 327m tonnes of meat. Oil is used to manufacture the fertilizers required by industrial agriculture, to power agricultural machinery and to transport foodstuffs. When we consume the products of industrial agriculture we are consuming oil and emitting carbon dioxide, just as we do when we drive a car.

A vegan diet consumes less agricultural land and less fossil fuels. Quite apart from concerns about the welfare of animals, concern about climate change should push us to reduce the amount of meat and dairy that we consume.