



Why we should all cut back on meat

*Editor's Note: Heather Moore is a staff writer for the **PETA Foundation**. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) works to promote animal rights and mitigate cruelty against animals.*

By **Heather Moore** – Special to CNN **October 24th, 2011** 03:59 PM ET



A hog-producing factory farm is seen on December 2003 in the Midwestern United States. The farm raises pigs for five and a half months, confined to these pens, until they are taken to slaughter. (Getty Images)

There are currently about **7 billion people on this planet**, and experts predict that there will be at least 9 billion by 2050. Global meat consumption is projected to double by then too. The Earth simply cannot sustain so many meat-eaters.

A **recent report** by the Worldwatch Institute's Nourishing the Planet project shows that global meat production increased by 2.6 percent in 2010. Worldwide meat production has tripled over the last four decades and increased 20 percent in the past 10 years. Much of the meat is produced in industrialized countries. The average

American eats **twice as much meat** as the average person worldwide. According to Worldwatch President Robert Engelman, the "world's supersized appetite for meat" is one of the main reasons why **greenhouse-gas emissions** are still increasing rapidly.

If we want to halt climate change—as well as conserving fossil fuel, water, land and other resources—we must *at least* cut back on the amount of meat we eat. Pigs, chickens, cows, sheep and other animals raised for food produce approximately 130 times as much excrement as the entire U.S. human population. Just one cow can produce **140 pounds of manure a day**. Animal waste releases powerful greenhouse gasses into our atmosphere. The livestock sector is one of the largest sources of carbon dioxide and the single largest source of both methane and nitrous oxide, greenhouses gasses that are **25 and 300 times more potent** than carbon dioxide, respectively. These greenhouse gasses wreak havoc on the climate, ultimately causing coastal flooding, forest fires, volatile food prices, public health problems, and other environmental issues that, in turn, impact our **economy** as well. A recent Canadian **report** indicates that greenhouse-gas emissions could cost the Canadian economy up to C\$43 billion a year by 2050—unless authorities take steps to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions. British economist Sir Nicholas Stern believes that climate change will produce the greatest and widest-ranging **market failure** ever seen. Stern predicts up to a 20 percent drop in the world's **gross domestic product** by 2050 if we fail to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions.

The cost of doing nothing is expensive—and people are going to have a big beef with politicians if they are hit with an exorbitant bill. But we can reduce greenhouse-gas emissions right now simply by eating more meatless meals. When the Environmental Working Group calculated the **ecological impact** of various conventionally grown foods, they found that if every American stopped eating meat and cheese for even just one day a week, it would be the same as if we collectively drove 91 billion fewer miles a year. Meat and dairy products require more resources and cause more greenhouse-gas emissions than do plant-based foods, according to a 2010 United Nations Environment Programme **report**. The report concludes that "a substantial reduction of impacts would only be possible with a substantial worldwide diet change, away from animal products."

This has been the consensus of many studies on the connection between diet and climate change. One **study**, conducted by German scientists from the Institute for Ecological Economy Research, even indicates that the volume of greenhouse gasses caused by a vegan's diet is seven times smaller than the volume of emissions caused by a meat-eater's diet.

The popular "**Meatless Mondays**" campaign, which was launched in the United States in 2003 by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, is now active in **21 countries**. If we want to combat the harmful environmental and economic effects of rising global meat consumption, we must all observe "**Meatless Mondays**"

on other days too. Many Americans have already cut back on meat—and that's a great start—but imagine what a difference it would make for the environment, animals and our health if everyone went vegan.

The views expressed in this article are solely those of Heather Moore.