

Meat consumption and our health

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Research results concerning public health and the environment, these days, are frightening. They must therefore serve as clarion calls on government to guide its loins for the task of confronting this burden frontally.

Global meat production and consumption have increased rapidly in recent decades, with harmful effects on the environment and public health as well as on the economy, according to research done by Worldwatch Institute's Nourishing the Planet project for Vital Signs Online.

Worldwide meat production has tripled over the last four decades and increased 20 percent in just the last 10 years. Meanwhile, industrial countries are consuming growing amounts of meat, nearly double the quantity than in developing countries



Large-scale meat production also has serious implications for the world's climate. Animal waste releases methane and nitrous oxide, greenhouse gases that are 25 and 300 times more potent than carbon dioxide, respectively

Research findings have proved that dirty, crowded conditions on factory farms can propagate sickness and disease among the animals, including swine influenza (H1N1), avian influenza (H5N1), foot-and-mouth disease, and mad-cow disease (bovine spongiform encephalopathy). These diseases not only translate into enormous economic losses each year the United Kingdom alone spent 18 to 25 billion dollars in a three-year period to combat foot-and-mouth disease----but they also lead to human infections.

According to experts, the amount of meat in people's diets has an impact on human health as well. Eaten in moderation, meat is a good source of protein and of important vitamins and nutrients such as iron, zinc, and vitamins B3, B6, and B12. But a diet high in red and processed meats can lead to a host of health problems, including obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer.

They argue eating organic, pasture-raised livestock can alleviate chronic health problems and improve the environment, that grass-fed beef contains less fat and more nutrients than its factory-farmed counterpart and reduces the risk of disease and exposure to toxic chemicals. For them, well-managed pasture systems can improve carbon sequestration, reducing the impact of livestock on the planet, and the use of fewer energy-intensive inputs conserves soil, reduces pollution and erosion, and preserves biodiversity.

Worldwide, per capita meat consumption increased from 41.3 kilogrammes in 2009 to 41.9 kilogrammes in 2010. People in the developing world eat 32 kilogrammes of meat a year on average, compared to 80 kilogrammes per person in the industrial world. Of the 880 million rural poor people living on less than \$1 per day, 70 percent are partially or completely dependent on livestock for their livelihoods and food security.

Demand for livestock products will nearly double in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, from 200 kilocalories per person per day in 2000 to some 400 kilocalories in 2050. Raising livestock accounts for roughly 23 percent of all

global water use in agriculture, equivalent to 1.15 liters of water per person per day. Livestock account for an estimated 18 percent of human-caused greenhouse gas emissions, producing 40 percent of the world's methane and 65 percent of the world's nitrous oxide. Seventy-five percent of the antibiotics used on livestock are not absorbed by the animals and are excreted in waste, posing a serious risk to public health.

An estimated 11 percent of deaths in men and 16 percent of deaths in women could be prevented if people decreased their red meat consumption to the level of the group that ate the least. Eating organic, pasture-raised animals can be healthier and environmentally beneficial compared to industrial feedlot systems.

Statistics show that Nigeria's per-capita meat consumption is approximately 6.4 kilogrammes a year, China's is about 23 kilogrammes, but, Canadians consume an average of 65 kilogrammes a year and the citizens of the US eat 95 kilogrammes. This shows the meat-centricity of Western society. But Nigeria is not only one of the largest meat producing countries in Africa but also one of the largest meat consumers in this region of the world, according to a study titled 'Consumerism: Statistical Estimation of Nigeria Meat Demand' by Osho Gbolahan Solomon and Asghar Nazemzadeh, University of Houston-Downtown.

Nigeria therefore has the benefit of hindsight and must therefore not be a victim of meat-related dangers highlighted here. Ministries of health across the country have a responsibility to educate Nigerians on required dietary eating habits.