

# Climate change and a responsible diet

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, livestock farming contributes more to global warming than total worldwide transportation. Nevertheless, this is still consistently ignored in the majority of discussions about climate. This pages, therefore, highlights the (often uncomfortable) truth regarding the connection between our own diet and climate change on the basis of statements from internationally recognised organisations.

You can find more information about the climate change in the internet:  
[http://www.vegetarismus.ch/klimaschutz/index\\_en.htm](http://www.vegetarismus.ch/klimaschutz/index_en.htm)

## Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations

The international nutritional organisation FAO has published a report of over 400 pages on the connection between animal husbandry and climate change.

The central statement of the press release is as follows:

*"According to a new report published by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, the livestock sector generates more greenhouse gas emissions as measured in CO2 equivalent – 18 percent – than transport. It is also a major source of land and water degradation."*

## Max Planck Society

The Managing Director of the Max Planck Institute for Terrestrial Microbiology Ralf Conrad on the problem of global warming:

*"In short, the motto could be: Don't eat any more cows, give up dairy products."*

The reasoning: cows produce a lot of methane, which is much more damaging to the climate than CO2.

## European Union

The European Commission responded in the following way to a question from the EVU on the topic climate change and nutrition:

*"Also raising the awareness of the climate impact of our behaviour as consumers is important. Organisations like the European Vegetarian Union can play an important role. Rather than any theoretical command and control policy by governments awareness of consumers plays a significant role in changing consumption patterns of agricultural products. In this respect I would like to encourage you to continue your work."*

Unfortunately the EU Commission is very reserved with its findings on the consequences of meat consumption. However, the following tip can be found (after some searching) on their climate change web page:

*"Eat your veg! Producing meat is both CO2 and methane-intensive and requires large amounts of water. In fact, ruminant animals such as cattle, sheep and goats are large producers of methane due to the way that their digestive systems process food."*

## World Wildlife Fund (WWF)

Unfortunately the WWF has forbidden us to publish a statement from them (received in writing) on the subject of meat consumption and climate change. The only mention of the connection between vegetarianism and the environment on the WWF International website is hidden on a page relating to Europe's Common Agricultural Policy. There is no mention of meat consumption in the very visible section of their website on climate change.

## Greenpeace

Greenpeace International has not answered our repeated e-mails asking for their opinion on the link between climate change and nutrition, and the topic is completely ignored on their website.

## World Watch Institute

The WorldWatch Institute in Washington has been warning of the global consequences of meat production

for years. Climate change has naturally also been a recurring issue. In their article from 2004, «MEAT – Now, It’s Not Personal! But like it or not, meat-eating is becoming a problem for everyone on the planet», they summarise the findings and quote, among others, the following expert opinion:

*“One ton of methane, the chief agricultural greenhouse gas, has the global warming potential of 23 tons of carbon dioxide. A dairy cow produces about 75 kilograms of methane a year, equivalent to over 1.5 [metric] tons of carbon dioxide. The cow, of course, is only doing what comes naturally. But people are inclined to forget, it seems, that farming is an industry. We cleared the land, sowed the pasture, bred the stock, and so on. It’s a human business, not a natural one. We’re pretty good at it, which is why atmospheric concentrations of methane increased by 150 percent over the past 250 years, while carbon dioxide concentrations increased by 30 percent.”*

*Pete Hodgson, New Zealand Minister for Energy, Science, and Fisheries*

Sadly the WorldWatch Institute’s many warnings have still not been heeded.

### **Switzerland (Ministry for the Environment)**

The Swiss Vegetarian Society received the following answer from the Vice-President of the Ministry for the Environment Gérard Poffet to their enquiry on 16.01.2007:

*[...] The fundamental ecological disadvantages of current meat production cannot be denied. In the area of agriculture it has been possible to reduce the emissions of methane and nitrous oxide in Switzerland in the last few years through a reduction in the number of cattle and a realignment of the agricultural policy.*

*However, measures aimed at reducing CO2 emissions from the burning of fossil fuels have been given priority in the achievement of our climate-related goals, as around 80% of greenhouse gas emissions in Switzerland come from the burning of these energy sources. [...]*

The problems are therefore known to the authorities. However, the heavy subsidisation of the Swiss livestock industry contradicts this knowledge.

### **Germany (German Bundestag’s research committee)**

At least the Bavarian Minister for the Environment, Werner Schnappauf clearly mentioned the impact of nutrition, in particular meat consumption on the climate at the opening of the Organic Trade-Fair. Below is an excerpt from the press release of 15.2.2007:

*“Abstaining from meat once a week is a contribution towards preventing climate change, according to Schnappauf. Research has shown that the production of one kilo of beef uses 6.5 kilo CO2; in comparison, the same amount of fruit needs half a kilo, and vegetables only 150 grams. In short, 5 tips for shopping are: bring more plant-based foods into your diet, favour seasonal fruit and vegetables grown outdoors, give preference to locally-grown and sustainably-produced food, and consume more fresh and unprocessed produce, rather than frozen goods, according to the minister.”*

These words are promising. However, unfortunately virtually no information on this topic can be found outside of the press release.

### **Britain**

On its home page, the British government looks at the impact of various products on the environment and explicitly mentions that meat and dairy products have a large negative influence on the environment and the climate:

*“The production of meat and dairy products has a much bigger effect on climate change and other environmental impacts than that of most grains, pulses and outdoor fruit and vegetables.”*

The British belong to the biggest consumers of meat in Europe, but at the same time have by far the most vegetarians. This topic is therefore of particular relevance in Britain.

