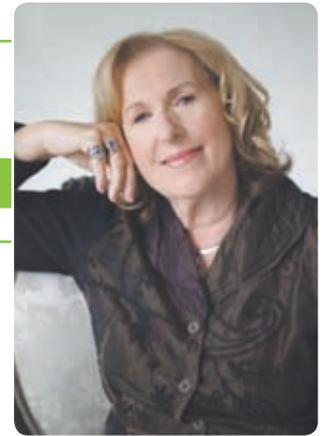


overview

with Dr Janice-Ann Priest



Meat-Free Mondays

A recent United Nations report on greenhouse gas emissions revealed that 18 per cent of the level came from the livestock sector, and is over and above the level from the transport industry.

Sir Paul McCartney followed Belgium's recently launched 'Veggie Thursday' movement, with a worldwide 'Meat-Free Monday' campaign (officially launched June 2009) in support of the United Nations report on climate change. With Yoko Ono and his daughters Stella and Mary, Sir Paul launched the 'Meat Free Monday' campaign alongside wellknown entertainers, politicians, environmental scientists and even chefs.

By launching the campaign, Sir Paul and his supporters have made an international plea for people to contribute to positive environmental change through eating less meat. Livestock produce 37 per cent methane, which has more than 20 times the global warming potential of carbon dioxide. Livestock production also emits 65 per cent of nitrous oxide, mostly from manure. The media campaign has attracted the attention of several countries, and has also been launched in Australia and the United States.

Designating a 'Meat-Free Monday' makes a meaningful environmental and ethical statement, directly addressing increasing world pollution. **By choosing Monday to avoid eating meat, poultry or pork you can contribute to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.** The environmental impact of growing so much grain for meat production is profound. The ecological footprint of world meat production includes forest destruction for ranching, water wastage, pollution and soil damage. To make the statistics real – the National Institute of Livestock and Grassland Science in Japan estimated that *"2.2 pounds of beef is responsible for the equivalent amount of carbon dioxide emitted by the average European car every 155 miles, and burns enough energy to light a 100-watt bulb for nearly 20 days."*

Not only has the increase in meat production affected the climate, but it has also affected a global epidemic of lifestyle diseases. The consumption of high fat, protein-fed meat and dairy products has greatly increased health complaints such as heart disease,

strokes and cancers, creating high, unsustainable health care costs and also higher health insurance. Reducing meat consumption will have multiple health benefits.

In 2007, meat production was estimated to be 275 million tons. In 1961, meat supply was 71 million tons; by 2008, world production was approximately 280 million tons. It is predicted that twice as much meat will be produced by 2050, totalling more than 465 million tons. Worldwide, 42 kg meat is produced per person, per year, with consumption rates varying. The developing world consume closer to 30 kg meat per person per year. Rising affluence has allowed meat/dairy foods to be consumed in the poorer nations, yet some one in six people still go hungry. For these people meat growing is an inefficient use of all-important grain crops, plus overgrazing ruins the soil for grain crops. Seven kilograms grain is needed to produce 1 kg beef, 7:1 for beef, 4:1 for pork and 2:1 for chicken. In 1998, 36 per cent of the world's grain was required to feed livestock. If the portion of the world's grain used for feed (670 millions tons) was reduced by 10 per cent, there would be enough grain to cover three years of population growth.

The US is still the largest beef producer, at 24 per cent, with the average American consuming nearly twice his or her weight each year, an average of 200 pounds of meat, poultry and fish per year. If Americans didn't eat meat for one meal a week, it would save 7.5 million tons of grain – enough to feed 25 million people. Surprisingly, 56 per cent of beef production occurs in the developing world.



Rising meat prices, and the Bovine disease outbreak in cows, has changed consumers' purchase, creating more of a demand for chicken – and an increase in production of 106 per cent from 1975. However, the purchasing shift has created more battery production, and the Avian flu virus. In 2007, global poultry output was expected to be 93 million tons, with the United States as the major poultry producers at 30 per cent of the world production. Despite traditional religious beliefs, India and Pakistan are responding to consumer demand for more Western type diets.

In 2009, pig meat production is predicted to rise to 101 million tons. A decline occurred in 2006 due to China's culling of one million pigs because of respiratory disease. China remains the largest producers, and by far the largest consumers of pork – half the world's consumption. Pork per capita, has risen 34 per cent since 1975.

A large portion of the growing worldwide demand for animal products is being met by establishing concentrated animal feeding units. 56 billion animals are raised this way, then slaughtered.

67 per cent of the world's poultry is produced by factory farms, along with 42 per cent of pork foods. These farming units use specific commercial breeds of animals that fatten quickly on high protein diets. The units are often crowded, inhumane and the animals are vulnerable to disease because of substandard feed from offal, meat waste and poor grain. Cattle too are often confined to small plots, and arrive at the slaughterhouse, covered in manure – creating another environmental time bomb.

By eating less meat you too can contribute to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, as well as lessening the demand for concentrated animal feeding units.

In keeping with the environment, this magazine (excluding the cover) is printed on biodegradable paper.

According to the World Bank, the close proximity of cities and towns to concentrated livestock provides one of the most serious environmental and public health challenges. This has been evident in England (1984) with Mad Cow disease, in Hong Kong (1997) and China (2005) with the Avian flu, and most recently in Mexico (March 2009) with the Swine flu.

Water use and pollution are also major environmental issues. **Irrigation for feed crops amounts to 8 per cent of global human water use.** Then there's the manure, washed away into the water supply – full of heavy metals, nitrates and antibiotics (often injected) used in feeds, of which all go into the ground-water.

As the current scale of meat production wrecks havoc on our environment, increasing consumption rates threaten human health. According to the World Health Organisation this will bring about a further increase in epidemics and disease. Eating more vegetarian meals and embracing a vegan diet will preserve our environment and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, plus lower the risk of new viral diseases.

Could you start 'Meat-Free Mondays' in your home?

Healthy Options has been a meat-free focused magazine for 26 years. Enjoy the mouthwatering recipes in each issue, and as an extra bonus, visit: www.healthrecipes.co.nz for more delicious vegetarian recipes.

References for this article are available upon request.


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