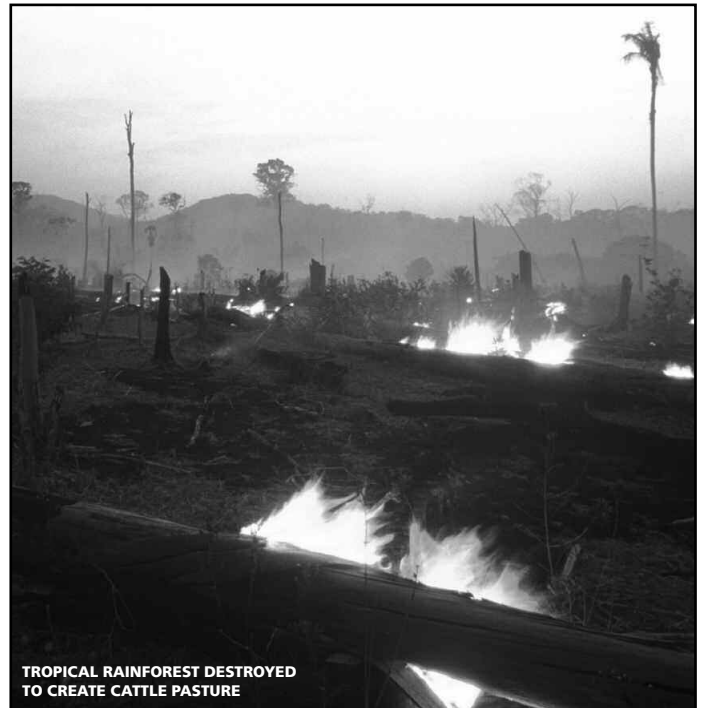


EATING MEAT: THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

What we choose to eat has a huge impact on the state of the planet and the survival of species all over the world. Rearing animals for food is one of the chief causes of environmental problems, such as climate change, rainforest destruction, pollution and food and water shortages.

Climate Change

A United Nations report stated that food animals are responsible for 18% of global greenhouse gases worldwide – more than is produced by land, sea and air transport together. While some dispute the exact UN findings, it is widely accepted that animal farming is one of the main causes of man-made global warming. Farmed animals are the number-one source of methane (CH₄). Although people often only think about carbon dioxide (CO₂) when they discuss global warming, methane is an even more potent greenhouse gas. The majority of methane is produced in the stomachs of sheep, cattle and other ruminants (animals who chew the cud), or else it is released from their manure. Animal farming also creates more than half of the nitrous oxide (N₂O) produced by human activity. This is an even more powerful greenhouse gas than methane, although it is produced in much smaller quantities.



TROPICAL RAINFOREST DESTROYED TO CREATE CATTLE PASTURE

used for animal feed.

Every year, 32 million acres of rainforest – an area the size of England – is damaged or destroyed, largely to meet a growing demand for beef.

When forests are cleared and burnt – known as deforestation – large amounts of CO₂ are released, thus contributing to global warming.

It is thought that the world's rainforests are home to between 50-75% of all plant and animal species on Earth. Once their habitat disappears, they may be lost forever. Deforestation on the current scale is therefore a disaster for wildlife.

Water use

Vast amounts of freshwater are used for animal farming. This is very wasteful. It takes 100,000 litres of water to produce 1kg of beef, compared to only 900 litres to produce 1kg of wheat. So you can see that using water to grow crops that are fed directly to people on a vegetarian diet is far more efficient.

To produce meat, water is needed to grow the crops that animals eat; vast amounts of water are also needed to process their bodies into meat at the slaughterhouse – in addition to the quantities that animals drink themselves.

The world's freshwater supply is diminishing. Already, approximately one third of the human population is suffering from shortages. The more freshwater we use for livestock farming, the less will be available for people to drink, or to use for growing crops.



CATTLE RANCHING IN THE AMAZON FOREST

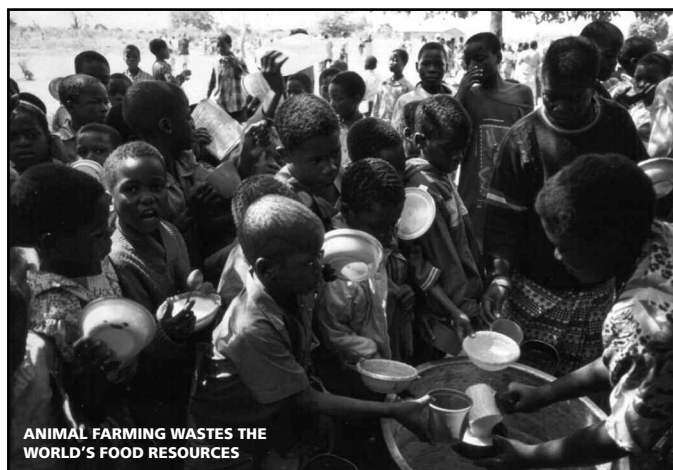
Deforestation

Cattle farming is the biggest threat facing the Amazon rainforest. Forests are felled to create pasture for cattle to graze, or else to grow feed for them, such as soya beans. The vast majority of the world's soya crop is

Pollution

Animals reared for food produce lots of waste – globally, the amount is estimated at 13 billion tonnes of manure per year. Liquid manure (slurry) from farmed animals oozes into waterways, polluting rivers and lakes. The problem is that there are so many animals being bred for food that the land cannot cope with the amount of waste produced. The high levels of ammonia it contains pollutes the land, water and air.

Water pollution is a particular problem because slurry contains high levels of nitrogen and phosphorus. This causes algae to form: algae that choke out other plant life and use up all the oxygen in the water. This process – called eutrophication – kills fish and other aquatic creatures.



Global food shortages

Fattening animals is a very inefficient way of producing food because animals waste most of the food they are fed in their digestive systems. Only a fraction of the calories they consume is converted into food that people can eat. It is estimated that for every 10kg of feed (grain or soybeans) fed to beef cattle, we get back only 1kg as meat.

You could feed up to 10 times as many people by using the available land to feed people directly (on a vegetarian diet), than by devoting it to fattening up animals.



Emptying the oceans

Over-fishing is driving many species to the brink of extinction. Because so many fish are caught in nets when they are too young to breed, numbers decline.

Many non-target fish get caught in trawlers' nets (known as by-catch) and are simply thrown back dead into the sea. Also, an estimated 300,000 whales, dolphins and porpoises die in fishing nets every year.

Fish farms make matters worse. Small fish are taken from the wild and made into pellets for feeding to farmed salmon and trout. It takes five tonnes of ocean-caught fish to produce one tonne of factory-farmed salmon.



The vegetarian option

Changing to a meat-free diet is one of the most positive steps that we can take to protect the environment. And a vegetarian diet has other benefits as well as being environmentally friendly. Studies have shown it to be healthier than an animal-based diet and, of course, it also prevents animal suffering.

WHAT YOU CAN DO!

- Find out more about the environmental impact of livestock farming.
- Contact Animal Aid for more information on a vegetarian or vegan diet. (See our website for a free info pack).
- Encourage your school to reduce its carbon footprint by adopting Meat-Free Mondays – contact Animal Aid to find out about this campaign.

