



Christianity



and

Vegetarianism

God's Earth. At creation, God gave humans plants and fruit for food (Gen. 1.29). It was not originally intended that humans would eat animals. Our consumption of meat is a consequence of turning away from God's original plan for us. Isaiah envisions a renewal of creation so that the wolf, lamb, calf and child live peaceably together (11.6-9, 65.17-25).

God's Animals. The Old Testament requires that animals be well treated before slaughter (Deut.5.12-15, 22.10, 25.4, Lev. 3.1, 3.6, 22.27-8) and its detailed laws prevent inhumane slaughter (Lev.17, Deut. 12.13-27, Acts 15.19-21). But in the modern secular meat industry there is routine cruelty, including factory farming and mechanized butchery processes during which some animals regain consciousness.

World Hunger. Jesus said 'For I was hungry and you gave me food' (Matt. 25.35). Yet while tens of millions of people die annually from starvation and related diseases and almost a billion suffer from malnutrition, more than one third of the world's harvested grain is fed to animals being raised for slaughter. Converting these plant foods to meat wastes 67-90 percent of the protein, most of the calories and all of the fibre.

Your Health. The New Testament values good health and Paul teaches that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (3 Jn. 2, 1 Cor. 6.19). We should therefore care for our bodies so that they may be used in God's service. Meat eating increases levels of heart disease, obesity, high blood pressure and various cancers, shortening the lives of many people.

Reading the Signs of the Times

Because meat eating is a major source of global injustice and ecological decay it can no longer be justified on a Christian basis. The apostle Paul teaches that Christians should consider the impact of their dietary choices on each other and on mission, and amend those choices accordingly.

(Rom. 14, 1Cor.10).

Rediscovering Christian Stewardship

Many Christians through history have applied their faith to their diet.

- **Early Christian leaders** recognised the harm meat does to the body and soul, and ate a simple plant based diet, shunning excess. In many monasteries, meat was forbidden to all healthy adults.
- In **Medieval and Reformation Britain** everyone was required to abstain from meat during Lent, on particular days of the week and on the eves of festivals. Meat was banned on more days of the week than it was allowed. Eating meat in Lent became legal only in the 1660s.
- From **St Francis to William Wilberforce**, Christians throughout history have been moved by the Bible's condemnation of animal cruelty and have taught that we have a duty of mercy.
- **Major Evangelical figures** have recognised the personal and social value of abstinence from meat. These include John Wesley (Methodist), Charles Spurgeon (Baptist) and William Booth (Salvation Army).
- Christians in the **dietary reform movement** of nineteenth century America developed healthy alternatives to meat-laden meals. These included breakfast cereals, peanut butter and other meat substitutes. Their tasty products are now enjoyed across the world!

In the Bible, bad food choices are the source of moral and spiritual decline. These include the Fall (Gen. 3) and Israel's disobedience in the wilderness (Num.11). Gluttony (including extravagant eating as well as eating too much) can be seen as the primary sin from which others follow. Where alternatives are available, to rely on meat is to commit gluttony.

In society there is a growing interest in sustainable diet, social justice and embodied spirituality. To promote mission, churches need to engage with these and rediscover their spiritual heritage. Many people see churches as disconnected from daily life.

An Ecumenical Witness

The Roman Catholic Bishops' Conference for England and Wales has restated that Catholics should abstain from meat on Fridays. In the Orthodox Churches, abstention is required for particular days and seasons. Prayer with fasting is embraced in many Evangelical Churches as part of normal Christian living.

Animal Agriculture and Environmental Damage

Climate Change: Livestock and industrial fishing carry a large share of the blame and constitute the second largest source of greenhouse gases.

Deforestation & Biodiversity: The destruction of forests has continued unabated, at a rate of 8.9 million hectares annually in the decade to 2000 and 7.3 million hectares annually between 2000 and 2005.

Desertification – Soil Degradation: Topsoil is essential for life yet is retreating, disappearing and degrading where animals are farmed.

Destruction of the Oceans: The consumption of animal protein that is wreaking havoc on earth is matched by the devastation being caused to the oceans by overfishing for yet another source of animal protein. As on land, the situation is exacerbated by large-scale pollution and factory farming.

Pollution – Antibiotics: Antibiotics have been massively overused by farmers in intensive farms. Bacteria have become resistant to the drugs so that when the same drugs are used to treat humans, they do not work.

Pollution – Chemicals: A huge number of pollutants are produced by rearing, feeding and processing animals. The United Nations Environment Programme believes this will soon damage fishstocks even more than the overfishing (UNEP, 2006). Waste from livestock production exceeds the capacity of the planet to absorb it.

Pesticide Pollution: Without intensive agriculture and the lavish application of both fertilisers and pesticides, including fungicides and herbicides, crop yields would be insufficient to provide the volume of fodder required. This process of dousing the land with chemicals is destroying its fertility and contributing to land degeneration, in fact reducing the amount of land available. Pesticides can impact on the lives of all animals, including humans and plants, and can cause cancers, tumours and lesions, disrupt the immune and endocrine systems, affect reproduction and result in birth defects. In practice, the whole food chain can be affected.

United Nations report *Livestock's Long Shadow* (2006)

Summary: Livestock's contribution to environmental problems is on a massive scale and its potential contribution to their solution is equally large. The impact is so significant that it needs to be addressed with urgency.

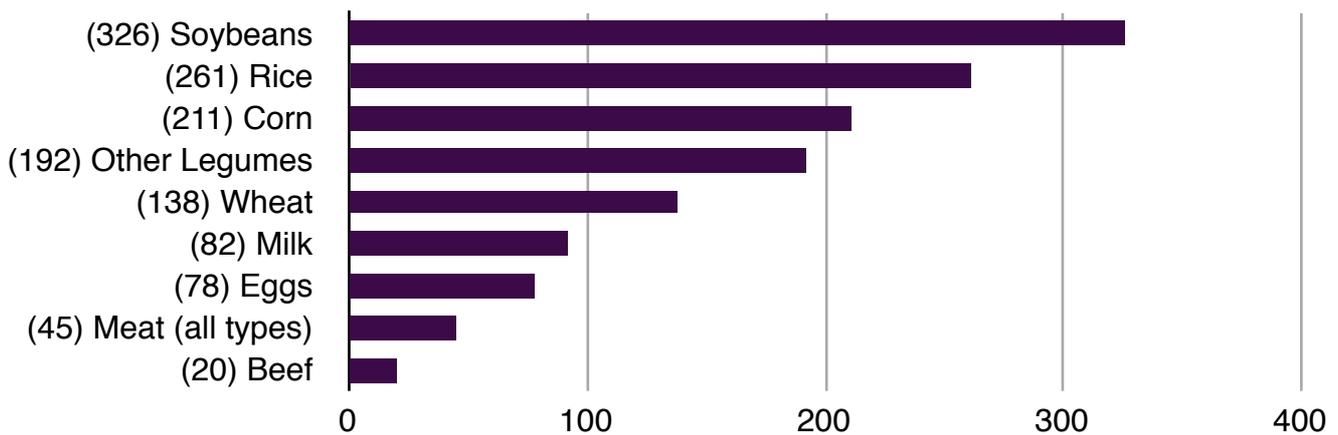
Cruelty to Animals

If consumers personally had to raise animals with the tortuous methods of intensive factory farming and then personally slaughter the animals they ate, very few would continue to eat meat. They would recognise that the abusive treatment of animals is morally wrong and would have no part in it.

Richard Alan Young, Professor of New Testament Studies

Land Use Efficiency

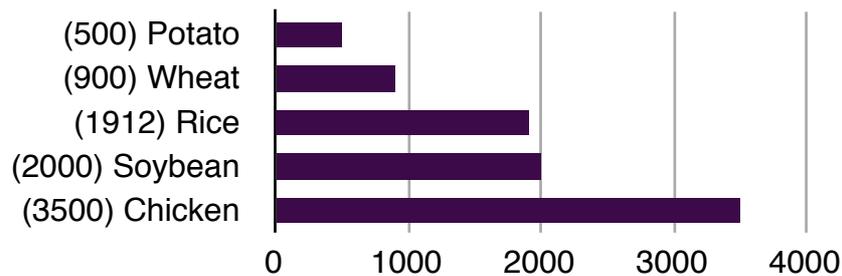
Pounds of usable protein per acre



Source: USDA:FAO/WHO/Unicef Protein Advisory Group.

Water Use Efficiency

Litres of water required to produce 1 Kilogram of food



**And Beef is off the scale
at 100,000 litres per kilogram!**

Resources

Pimentel – Sustainability of food based diets. Cornell University www.ajcn.org
The Global benefits of eating less meat. CIWF Trust 04 www.wellfedworld.org
VIVA and Vegetarian and Vegan Foundation www.viva.org.uk
Livestock's Long Shadow www.fao.org/docrep/010/a0701e/a0701e00.htm

A CVAUK Information Sheet

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