



# Benefit Yourself and Earth, Too

## The Benefits of Eating Less Meat

**IMPROVING YOUR HEALTH:** There is no question – people who consume large amounts of meat seriously endanger their health. Fat, cholesterol, and other substances in meat, dairy products, and eggs have been conclusively linked to higher rates of heart attack, stroke, cancer (breast, prostate and colon), and other diseases.

What about getting enough protein? While meat has protein, it is almost impossible **not** to get enough protein from a well-balanced diet of vegetables, legumes, breads, and whole grains that provide sufficient calories for living.

**REDUCING WORLD HUNGER:** Almost 1 billion people don't have enough to eat, about one out of six humans on the planet. Every year, 6 million children die from diseases related to malnutrition. The causes of world hunger are complex. They include poverty, poor distribution, political problems, war, and meat production.

However, the math of feeding animals is simple: it takes 16 pounds of grain to produce one pound of beef and eight pounds of grain for one pound of pork. In the U.S., 70% of grain is fed to animals. Many third-world nations have converted farmland that once grew food for their own citizens to produce feed for livestock exported to Western nations. This has resulted in a significant loss of potential food for the world's hungry.

**PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT:** The Union of Concerned Scientists cites food production as second only to transportation in degrading our environment. With meat the major factor, food production accounts for 25% of threats to natural ecosystems. Here's how:

**Global Warming:** Burning fossil fuel creates carbon dioxide, the main cause of global warming. This is an integral part of meat processing, including transportation and production of fertilizers for grains grown for livestock. Producing a pound of beef generates as much CO<sub>2</sub> as burning a half-gallon of gasoline.

In addition, belching and manure of livestock generate huge amounts of methane, a greenhouse gas 23 times more powerful than CO<sub>2</sub>. Finally, millions of acres of rain forest have been cleared for meat production, devastating one of the world's great resources for removing CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere.

Note: If you do eat beef, look for grain-fed or range-fed meat and avoid corn-fed beef. The manure of corn-fed beef is a major source of bacterial contamination of ground water.

**Water Supply:** About 18% of the world's water is used to feed livestock, including enormous amounts for irrigation. To produce one pound of beef requires 2,500 gallons of water, the equivalent of 500 showers. Aquifers and surface water all over the world are in serious jeopardy of depletion, which could turn now-productive farmland into dust bowls. Many scientists believe that in the near future water will surpass energy as humanity's most serious shortage.

**Water and Air Pollution:** The sheer amount of manure produced by livestock, 2 billion tons a year, is wreaking havoc on the environment. One gas generated from manure, hydrogen sulfide, causes illnesses ranging from sore throats to seizures. Manure, from factory farms of pigs, chickens, and cows, contaminates drinking water and has already caused several disease outbreaks in humans and killed millions of fish.

**Marine Ecosystems:** In the last 40 years, the number of marine fisheries fully exploited, overexploited, or collapsed has risen from 5 to 60%. Some fish, including Atlantic cod and haddock, have almost disappeared. Recent studies indicate that fresh-water fish species, like their marine counterparts, are threatened by over-fishing, pollution, and destruction of habitat. And devastation of any species affects the entire related food chain.

**LIVING OUR UU VALUES:** In the U.S., most of our meat, eggs, and dairy products are produced in factories where animals are treated like machines. Chickens are raised in windowless warehouses, their beaks removed to keep them from killing each other in extremely crowded conditions. Pigs are fed hormones to make them grow and antibiotics to keep them alive. They live in cages where they stand in their own waste. Milk cows may be kept in cramped, narrow stalls where they are unable to move around. When we eat food produced by such poor creatures, are we promoting respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part?

(Sources: American Cancer Society. American Heart Association. Audubon Society. John Robbins, *The Food Revolution, Diet For A New America*. National Academy of Sciences. Natural Resources Defense Council. Physicians' Committee for Responsible Medicine. Union of Concerned Scientists. USDA. US EPA. Worldwatch Institute, Vital Signs 2006-2007. T. Colin Campbell and Thomas M. Campbell, *The China Study*. And our thanks to the First Unitarian Church, Portland, OR whose materials we have adapted and updated.)

## The Benefits of Eating Local Food

**REDUCING GLOBAL WARMING:** The average mouthful of food travels an estimated 1,500 miles to reach us, requiring a staggering amount of fossil fuel. Every time we eat food locally grown or produced, we reduce the need for these transportation costs, both financial and environmental.

**SUPPORTING LOCAL FARMERS:** Local farmers are being driven out of business by cheaper imported food, often produced with much cheaper labor and lower environmental standards. Farmland in our area is at a premium, because of pressure by developers wanting to buy land for housing developments.

In Yolo County, and for that matter the greater Sacramento region, we are fortunate to have community supported agriculture (CSA) programs that bring produce and other farm products directly from farms to consumers. Many local CSA programs use organic production methods. It is possible to find a program that is just right for you.

*The advantages of buying local food are many, both for you and the farmer:*

- You receive fresh, delicious, nutritious food.
- Farmers stand much better chance of receiving a fair price and earning a decent living.
- Family farms are preserved, enriching our local communities.

**ENHANCING FOOD SECURITY:** In the aftermath of the tragic events of September 11, 2001, we are reminded of how dependent we are on foreign oil. The same principle holds true for food. Every time we import food instead of producing it locally, we become more dependent upon potentially unstable sources.

Farmers often receive prices from middlemen at or below the cost of production. Pressured to sell, family farms are bought up by developers or huge multinational corporations with absentee owners, who often destroy local communities. Since 1945, the total number of farms in the U.S. has dropped by two-thirds.

With more control of our entire agricultural system in the hands of a few large corporations, local independent farmers are increasingly losing any control whatsoever of land ownership and crop choices, distribution and prices. The suicide rate among U.S. farmers is three times the national average.

(Sources: Center for Rural Affairs. Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*. USDA.)

## The Benefits of Eating Organic Food

**REDUCING GLOBAL WARMING:** As people become more knowledgeable, organic foods sales in the U.S. have soared by 20% a year for over 10 years, and the trend is expected to continue.

### AVOIDING HARMFUL SUBSTANCES

By eating organic, you are reasonably assured that harmful substances will not get into the soil, food crops, and your body. Here are a few, among others, you will not get:

**Pesticides:** Chemicals that kill unwanted insects also can kill beneficial ones, such as ladybugs, bees, and many butterflies. When one part of the food chain is affected, *all parts are affected*, including birds and amphibians that feed on insects and people that eat the food. Diseases ranging from neurological disorders to cancer have been linked to pesticides. And the effect can be long lasting: virtually all Americans have measurable residues of DDT in their tissues, even though it was banned in the U.S. in 1972.

**Hormones:** One example – approximately 25% of the milk produced in the U.S. today is from cows injected with bovine growth hormone (rBGH), which may be linked to prostate and breast cancer. Moreover, since it increases rates of painful udder infections, cows are often given antibiotics, which in turn, can be ingested by people. The United States is the only industrialized country in the world that hasn't banned this use of rBGH.

**Genetically-Engineered Foods:** Biotech companies have inserted founder genes into tomatoes, rat genes into broccoli, and human genes into fish. The major concern, beyond ethical questions, is that there is no guarantee concerning the long-term health effects of these foods and the difficulty of keeping genetically-engineered organisms (GMOs) separate from natural ones. The threat that potentially harmful GMO plants and animals will “leak” both into the environment and into people is quite real. Starlink corn, approved only for animal feed, escaped into the U. S. food supply in 2000, contaminating taco shells and nearly 300 other processed foods.

A word about prices: Organic foods often cost more than non-organic foods. However, pasta, beans, cereals, grains, etc., in bulk food sections often are bargains because packaging costs are reduced. And better long-term health from eating organic food may well be worth the extra cost.

(Sources: John Robbins, *Diet for A New America*. John Ryan and Alan Durning, *Stuff: The Secret Lives of Everyday Things*. NY Coalition for the Alternatives to Pesticides. Martin Teitel, Kim Wilson, *Genetically Engineered Food*. World Health Organization. And special thanks to the First Unitarian Church, Portland, OR for most of this report

