

## Veganism and the Environment

Posted on [March 28, 2013](#)

*Corey Wrenn, VegFund's Spring 2013 intern, summarizes the latest research on the negative environmental impacts of animal agriculture as well as the environmental benefits of vegan diets.*

While most individuals tend to go vegan due to ethical concerns for other animals or for their personal health, the heavy impact Nonhuman Animal products have on the environment is another important motivator (Fox and Ward 2008). [According to the United Nations](#), Nonhuman Animal agriculture has been a primary contributor to the following environmental degradations:

- Desertification
- Deforestation
- Rising temperatures
- Rising sea levels
- Melting icecaps
- Water scarcity and depletion
- Water pollution and eutrophication
- Land erosion and sedimentation
- Reduced biodiversity
- Introduction of non-native species
- Release of antibiotics, hormones, and ectoparasitides
- Release of antibiotic-resistant and pathogenic bacteria
- Release and accumulation of heavy metals and organic pollutants
- Increased disease risk

In 2006, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United States conducted a [report](#) warning that present levels of livestock production are unsustainable and were responsible for as much as 18% of greenhouse gas emissions (Steinfeld et al. 2006). However, a more recent [World Watch report](#) found that Nonhuman Animal agriculture was actually responsible for as much as 51% of those emissions (Goodland and Anhang 2009).

Research also abounds that recognizes the importance of vegan eating in relieving environmental strains. [A recent analysis of seventh day Adventists](#) found that those ascribing to the vegan diet had a 42% lower contribution to greenhouse gas emissions than respondents who consumed the standard American diet based on Nonhuman Animal products (Soret 2013, Watson 2013). [Another report](#) calculated the impact of various diets and found that the vegan diet could reduce an individual's environmental impact by as much as 66% (Baroni et al. 2007).

A plant-based diet is also found to [reduce water consumption by 54%](#) (compared to only 35% savings with efficient water fixtures) (Marlow et al. 2009). [Another report](#) suggests that vegan eating can reduce an individual's contribution to carbon dioxide emissions by about 701kg annually (Eshel and Martin 2006). Finally, vegan diets have been found to be the most resource efficient. For instance, [the grain used to feed livestock in America alone could feed 840 million vegans](#) (Pimentel 2004).

For even more facts and figures, visit the [For the Planet](#) section of the VegFund website.

### References

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WHY VEG?

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BLOG

- 2013  
 + March (5)  
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+ 2012  
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## 2 Responses to *Veganism and the Environment*



**Dan Brook, Ph.D.** says:

March 28, 2013 at 8:14 PM

For more information about the \*many\* benefits of veganism, and the many eco-problems with eating meat and other animal products, please visit Eco-Eating at <http://www.brook.com/veg>

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**Jim Corcoran** says:

March 29, 2013 at 7:47 PM

"As environmental science has advanced, it has become apparent that the human appetite for animal flesh is a driving force behind virtually every major category of environmental damage now threatening the human future: deforestation, erosion, fresh water scarcity, air and water pollution, climate change, biodiversity loss, social injustice, the destabilization of communities, and the spread of disease." ~ Worldwatch Institute, "Is Meat Sustainable?"

"If every American skipped one meal of chicken per week and substituted vegetables and grains... the carbon dioxide savings would be the same as taking more than half a million cars off of U.S. Roads." ~ Environmental Defense Fund

“A 1% reduction in world-wide meat intake has the same benefit as a three trillion-dollar investment in solar energy.”

~ Chris Mentzel, CEO of Clean Energy

“It’s not a requirement to eat animals, we just choose to do it, so it becomes a moral choice and one that is having a huge impact on the planet, using up resources and destroying the biosphere.”

~ James Cameron, movie director, environmentalist, new vegan

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