



Alton Sustainable Eating



Healthy Food, Healthy Planet

EVIDENCE OF THE DEVASTATING IMPACTS MEAT AND DAIRY HAVE ON THE PLANET ARE BECOMING HARDER TO IGNORE!

By Dee Panes, ACAN's consultant on Sustainable Eating

What we eat and how it is produced has more impact on our food carbon footprint than the distance it has travelled. It's such a shock that it feels unbelievable to think that this is true. But....



Animal foods require vastly more energy and resources to produce than plant foods. This is UNSUSTAINABLE.



🚫 A dietary shift away from animal products can be far more effective than buying local as a means of lowering one's food-related environmental impact.

Many folks believe that eating local food is better for the environment. But in recent years, a series of studies have shown that eating locally produced food might not be as environmentally impactful – in and of itself – as advocates once hoped. In fact, research shows that the carbon footprint of transporting food is relatively small, and that it's more important to focus on how your food is produced. When thinking about greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions what you eat is far more important than where your food travelled from.

So, let's take a look at this.

The greatest source of emissions can vary among foods. In many crops, it's the fertilizer and pesticides required to grow large quantities of food on industrial farms. We also have water usage to consider, the most effective use of the land to produce that food type, the processes adopted to produce that food. So, how food is produced has a much bigger impact than how it's transported.

Growing seasonal produce under the sun, and then exporting it, generally results in much lower emissions than growing it domestically in energy-guzzling greenhouses. And *what's* being produced matters even more. For example, beef is always going to be more environmentally damaging than just about all other foods, regardless of where it comes from. In beef, less than 1% of emissions come from transportation while the vast majority come just from feeding cattle (and their methane-heavy burps). Local meat is generally more carbon intensive than plant-based food shipped around the world.

Interestingly, the vast majority of greenhouse gas emissions – 61% – come during production, while food is still on the farm. That's supported by research published in the early 2000s in the US and Europe!

What about mode of transport? Surely that matters and can make a difference?

Yes sure. But what a lot of folks might not be aware of is this; when it comes to transport, it's not just the distance that matters, but the mode of transport. Air freighting is high in emissions, but only 0.16% of food is air freighted. The majority of food shipped internationally comes by sea. Thus the food miles myth is rooted in a combination of not understanding where food's environmental components come from, plus the psychological aspects of buying local. Just because something has been produced locally, doesn't mean that the quality is top notch, or that the farming practices, including production processes, are any more superior, or indeed that the resulting GHG emissions will be lower.

In the end....

WHAT WE EAT AND HOW IT IS PRODUCED HAS MORE IMPACT ON OUR FOOD CARBON FOOTPRINT THAN THE DISTANCE IT HAS TRAVELLED.

Ok, so, is there any benefit to eating local produce and animal products?

Supporting local farmers that advocate for environmentally friendly production practices, such as minimizing their use of fossil fuel-rich pesticides and fertilizers are a consideration, but what's being produced and how, is equally important. For example, beef is always going to be more environmentally damaging than just about all other foods, regardless of where it comes from. Local meat is generally more carbon intensive than plant-based food shipped around the world.

Eating local can still be great for supporting the local economy, community, and knowing how it's grown, but it's an exaggerated benefit to ecological footprints. It is more environmentally friendly to eat a plant-based diet, even if what you eat is shipped around the world, than to buy meat from a local farmer. There are clearly other benefits to buying food produced nearby, like supporting local economies and strengthening communities. 👍 Vegetables from a neighbourhood garden are both low-emissions and local.

The truth behind 'eco-friendly' local meat

Many people who support the buy-local food narrative often ignore the fact that there are many other far larger factors than transportation that impact a product's carbon footprint.



Land use



Deforestation



Methane production mostly from cattle.



Massive storage lagoons of manure from confined animals



Nitrous oxide from over-fertilized fields



The storage of meat and similar products, since animal-sourced foods typically require significant refrigeration.



Even food waste's impacts are dominated by animal-sourced ones.

To conclude:

The myth that has become increasingly popular, that food miles matter so much more than buying local animal products, doesn't scientifically stack up. There's just no way around it: a diet that's kinder to the planet has to involve cutting down on animal based products.

We attach a diagram showing everyone GHG emissions across the supply chain for everyone who reads this post to take a look at and we also attach a LINK to the original website in the references section (see comments) and in a separate easy to find comment section so that you can see the diagram easily.

REFERENCES:

1. Our World In Data: <http://tinyurl.com/u8mzpf4w>
2. Food production alone is set to push Earth past 1.5°C of warming: <https://www.newscientist.com/article/2259164-food-production-alone-is-set-to-push-earth-past-1-5c-of-warming/>
3. Reducing food's environmental impacts through producers and consumers: <http://tinyurl.com/2s3ujb8j>
4. The role of trade in the greenhouse gas footprints of EU diets: <http://tinyurl.com/45h39cnh>
5. World Resources Institute <http://tinyurl.com/yjejfe5z>
6. World in Data: Food: <https://ourworldindata.org/food-choice-vs-eating-local>