

# Vegan for the environment

Saving our planet with plant-based diets



 The  
Vegan Society

One world. Many lives. Our choice.



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damaging activities that  
humankind undertakes



The population on earth is growing – and it's not just humans who are multiplying. Numbers of farmed animals are rising exponentially, with devastating environmental consequences.

Many people are becoming increasingly aware of their ecological footprint and are making eco-friendly choices: taking shorter showers, cycling to work and recycling. While these are positive steps, to have any meaningful effect on our planet we must change our diets.

Animal agriculture is arguably the most damaging activity that we undertake. It is one of the most significant contributors to climate change, responsible for at least 14.5% of global greenhouse gas emissions. It is also the leading cause of species extinction, ocean dead zones, water pollution and habitat destruction. We need to tackle these issues at their root by examining the hidden costs of the food we eat.

### Cutting greenhouse gas emissions

Farmed animals and their byproducts account for 32 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions per year – a major contributor to global warming. Cattle also emit methane, which is 20 times more potent than carbon dioxide. Each cow produces around 700 litres of methane per day – the equivalent of driving a large 4x4 vehicle 35 miles. Animal manure also contains nitrous oxide which releases ammonia into the atmosphere and pollutes rivers, in turn killing fish and depleting sources of drinking water.

The felling of forests to grow food for the expanding population of cattle, pigs and chickens results in fewer trees to absorb harmful carbon dioxide. Factory farming also burns vast quantities of fossil fuels, much of it in producing, transporting and processing feed.



**Around 3.5 billion humans could live off the food currently fed to livestock**

### Using resources efficiently

With more people to feed than ever before, it's vital that we begin to distribute resources fairly, and ensure that everyone has enough to eat and drink. We could easily feed everyone on earth by switching over to a less wasteful method of food production – crop farming, rather than animal farming.

Farmed animals consume far more resources than they can ever produce. Feeding grains to animals to then consume ourselves will always be less efficient than eating plant food directly. With 800 million people going hungry each day, this makes little sense.

In a time when millions of people are affected by drought every year, the consumption of animal products is responsible for 92% of the water footprint of humanity. Since a large percentage of the crops fed to European farmed animals is grown in developing countries, this wasted water comes from areas where drinking water is already scarce.





### **Protecting habitats and endangered species**

Farmed animals and their feed require huge areas of land. As a result of this, more and more of the Earth's surface is being exhausted to satisfy consumer demands for animal products.

Deforestation is occurring at an alarming rate, with 1-2 acres of rainforest cleared every second. The World Bank states that animal agriculture is responsible for up to 91% of Amazon destruction, and around 80% of deforestation globally. This habitat degradation has led to an unprecedented rate of extinction, with species of vertebrates disappearing 114 times faster than they would without the impact of human activity.

Species extinction extends beyond the forests, as overfishing has placed marine life under extreme threat. If we continue at this rate, experts estimate that we could see fishless oceans as soon as 2048.

Animal agriculture is at the root of many of the greatest threats facing the environment. In addition, animal products contribute to the unfair distribution of resources and cause a huge amount of pain and suffering to animals, while also damaging our health. Going vegan helps to protect the only Earth we have, as well as all who live on it.

Try going vegan for a week with our Plate Up for the Planet challenge: [vegansociety.com/plateup](https://vegansociety.com/plateup). You can also find plenty of help and support at [vegansociety.com/go-vegan](https://vegansociety.com/go-vegan).