

# Reduce your carbon footprint: eat less meat

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The consumption of meat has many facets to it — how it affects the health of the consumer, the ethical dimension of animal slaughter, the cost of current day meat production — but one of the most pertinent elements of meat-eating to the condition of the world today is its impact on the environment.



Joy Damon

Reducing the amount of meat you eat is easy at Guilford College. The difficulty lies in the realization of why this should be done.

## For our water

4,200 gallons. According to Richard Schwartz, author of "Judaism and Vegetarianism," this is the standard amount of water that meat-eating Americans require to function every day. It is used for animals' drinking water, irrigation, processing, washing, and cooking. A person on a vegan (animal-product-free) diet, on the other hand, requires only 300 gallons of water per day.

Fresh water is a resource that many people take for granted, but it's one that has its limits. According to the Worldwatch Institute, an organization dedicated to sustainable living, humans are consuming about half the available fresh water on the planet, leaving the other half for the million or more other species who inhabit our Earth. Studies conducted by the [International Water Management Institute](#) show that industrial agriculture is the heaviest user of water on our planet.

The authors of the 2004 edition of World Watch Magazine suggest that the most effective way to reduce the substantial amount of water that humans use, and thus prevent a depletion of fresh water, is to reduce the amount of meat that we eat.

## For our atmosphere

"Livestock operations account for more greenhouse gas emissions than the transportation sector," says Dr. Ward Robinson, medical director of the Guilford County Department of Public Health.

This means that you could lessen your environmental impact more by refraining from eating an extra pound of meat every day than by not driving an extra mile every day.

"The greenhouse gas emissions of livestock and the fossil fuel used in transporting cattle, poultry, and hogs over long distances are two signs that support the idea that the concentration of the meat industry in certain locations has had, and will continue to have, significantly detrimental effects on human health and the overall environment," asserted Jim Hood, professor of English. Hood is currently teaching the FYE "What Should We Eat," which focuses on the various impacts — environmental, social, and ethical — of the human diet.

## **For our land**

According to John Robbins, author of the Pulitzer Prize-nominated "Diet for a New America," over 260 million acres of U.S. forest have been cleared in order to accommodate concentrated animal feeding operations.

Fifty-six million of these acres are producing hay for livestock. Only 4 million acres are actually producing vegetables for direct human consumption, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce's 2004 Census of Agriculture.

In order to prevent global starvation due to lack of land used for food production, the Worldwatch Institute believes that "only one major option remains: to cut back sharply on meat consumption, because conversion of grazing land to food crops will increase the amount of food produced."

## **On the brighter side**

Guilford professors, such as Hood, and experts all over the world are raising awareness about the effects that eating meat has on our Earth.

"I was curious about the production of food; where does it come from?" explained Hood. "I decided to teach this FYE because I realized I didn't know what the answer was. I wanted to make my problem other people's problem and introduce students to how to face academic, as well as global, issues with a rational, confident attitude."

This curiosity and confident attitude may revolutionize how humanity views eating meat. While the arguments for animal rights are many, the argument for eating less meat can be simple: it's better for the environment, and therefore, for you. You don't have to go full vegan, but try opting for a veggie burger at the Grill tomorrow, or sharing these facts with friends and family who care about the well-being of the Earth. We can lessen our impact on the environment if we all work together.