

Fighting global warming — at the dinner table

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Scientists report that eating chicken, vegetables or fish, such as the swordfish above, instead of red meat for just one meal per week does more to help fight climate change than "buying local." Credit: Courtesy of wikimedia commons

Substituting chicken, fish, or vegetables for red meat just once a week can help combat climate change — even more dramatically than buying locally sourced food, according to scientists in Pennsylvania who studied the environmental impacts of food production and distribution in the United States. The study is scheduled for the May 15 issue of ACS's bi-weekly journal *Environmental Science & Technology*.

In the study, Christopher L. Weber and H. Scott Matthews explain that environmental advocates and retailers have urged customers to purchase

goods from local sources to minimize environmental impacts. Despite this emphasis on “buying local,” the researchers point out that few studies in the U. S. have compared greenhouse gas emissions from food production to those of transportation.

Weber and Matthews found that the production phase dominates the average U.S. household’s greenhouse-gas burden — contributing 83 percent of them — whereas transportation accounts for only 11 percent. Red meat, according to the report, is almost 150 percent more greenhouse-gas-intensive than chicken or fish.

“Thus, we suggest that dietary shift can be a more effective means of lowering an average household’s food-related climate footprint than “buying local,”” the paper says. “Shifting less than one day per week’s worth of calories from red meat and dairy products to chicken, fish, eggs, or a vegetable-based diet achieves more greenhouse-gas reduction than buying all locally sourced food.”

Source: American Chemical Society

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