

Eating less meat and dairy products won't have major impact on global warming

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Reducing consumption of meat and dairy products might not have a major impact in combating global warming despite claims that link diets rich in animal products to production of greenhouse gases. Credit: Wikimedia

Cutting back on consumption of meat and dairy products will not have a major impact in combating global warming — despite repeated claims that link diets rich in animal products to production of greenhouse gases. That's the conclusion of a report presented here today at the 239th National Meeting of the American Chemical Society.

Air quality expert Frank Mitloehner, Ph.D., who made the presentation, said that giving cows and pigs a bum rap is not only scientifically inaccurate, but also distracts society from embracing effective solutions to global climate change. He noted that the notion is becoming deeply rooted in efforts to curb [global warming](#), citing campaigns for "meatless Mondays" and a European campaign, called "Less Meat = Less Heat,"

launched late last year.

"We certainly can reduce our [greenhouse-gas](#) production, but not by consuming less meat and milk," said Mitloehner, who is with the University of California-Davis. "Producing less meat and milk will only mean more hunger in poor countries."

The focus of confronting climate change, he said, should be on smarter farming, not less farming. "The developed world should focus on increasing efficient [meat production](#) in developing countries where growing populations need more [nutritious food](#). In developing countries, we should adopt more efficient, Western-style farming practices to make more food with less greenhouse gas production," Mitloehner said.

Developed countries should reduce use of oil and coal for electricity, heating and vehicle fuels. Transportation creates an estimated 26 percent of all [greenhouse gas emissions](#) in the U.S., whereas raising cattle and pigs for food accounts for about 3 percent, he said.

Mitloehner says confusion over meat and milk's role in [climate change](#) stems from a small section printed in the executive summary of a 2006 United Nations report, "Livestock's Long Shadow." It read: "The livestock sector is a major player, responsible for 18 percent of greenhouse gas emissions measured in CO₂e (carbon dioxide equivalents). This is a higher share than transport."

Mitloehner says there is no doubt that livestock are major producers of methane, one of the greenhouse gases. But he faults the methodology of "Livestock's Long Shadow," contending that numbers for the livestock sector were calculated differently from transportation. In the report, the livestock emissions included gases produced by growing animal feed; animals' digestive emissions; and processing [meat](#) and milk into foods. But the transportation analysis factored in only emissions from fossil

fuels burned while driving and not all other transport lifecycle related factors.

"This lopsided analysis is a classical apples-and-oranges analogy that truly confused the issue," he said.

Provided by American Chemical Society

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