Editorial: The other thing we need to do to save the planet: Eat less meat

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Our love for steaks and burgers is contributing to rapidly exploding climate change and ironically setting up the planet to one day not have enough to eat.

That's the warning more than 100 experts from 52 countries sounded off in a United Nation's Report about how global warming will destroy the world's food supply if humans don't change their ways.

All but the most hard-core reality deniers now know how much damage we have done to the climate through the burning of fossil fuels in cars and power plants, but the report from the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change offers extensive new scientific evidence that the way we grow our food and what we like to eat is also hurting the earth. Politicians and everyday citizens alike should heed the warnings. Both policy and personal behavioral modifications are needed to stem the tide.

We are going to need to change the way we farm and grow our food as well as adopt new eating habits. The report found that farming and forestry account for 23% of greenhouse gas emissions due to human behavior. Farming has turned large swaths of land across the world into deserts unsuitable for growing crops.

As the world tries to reach a goal to limit global warming to no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius, getting a handle on land use is going to be as critical as getting people to drive less and adopt clean energy sources. But we have little choice given that the U.N. said last year that the world has only about a decade to get a grasp on the issue before the damage can't be undone.

If we don't, climate change will degrade the land further, and that will make it more difficult to grow crops and keep an adequate food supply for all of the world. That only means more people will go hungry. If you're worried about global refugee crises now, imagine if huge swaths of the world are experiencing mass starvation. That's one of the reasons the U.S. military considers climate change to be a prime national security threat.

There are things that each and every one of us can do to fight climate change now until more widespread policies are adopted. For one, we can reduce food waste, a problem for the environment because methane is released into the atmosphere as food decomposes. From 2010 to 2016, food waste accounted for 8 to 10% of all greenhouse gas emissions, the report found. We can all do a better job at at buying what we know we are going to eat. Restaurants and grocery stores could give unsold food to homeless shelters and food pantries rather dumping so it ends up in the landfill. Everyone could start composting.

Secondly, we could all choose to eat less meat. We are not proposing that all people give up chicken and roast beef altogether and adopt a vegan lifestyle—unless of course you are inclined to do so. That is not realistic for everyone. But reducing meat consumption and adding more vegetarian and vegan dishes to our diets is. You may not be able to give up your car to bike to work everyday, but you might once or twice a week. It's the same with diet.

Many people are already making that switch. Just look at the popularity of meatless Mondays and Burger King's new Impossible Burger, which has been so popular that restaurants in Baltimore and elsewhere say they're having trouble stocking the vegetable protein-based patties. Cows account for a large portion of agriculture emissions, so as a country we need to look at ways to reduce this type of farming. Not to mention, eating less meat will improve the health of Americans, who have high rates of heart disease, diabetes and other diet-related chronic conditions.

Lastly, we can stop cutting down trees and use less productive farmland to plant more saplings. Ethiopa proved it's really not that hard to do when as a country it planted more than 350 million trees in 12 hours last month to combat deforestation. Trees are a friend to the environment with their ability to store carbon, remove carbon dioxide from the air and release oxygen into the atmosphere. More countries, including the

United States, need to take such initiatives.

Human habits and behaviors are hard to change, but the latest U.N. report only shows that if we don't, we will all pay the price.

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