

Re: Greening highlight action of eating less meat

An Excerpt from Bridget Oland, March 13, 2010, in Food, Green Living

For years health care practitioners have been telling us that if we ate less meat we'd all be a lot healthier. The average North American eats twice as much meat today as we did fifty years ago and it's taking a toll on our collective health. It's no wonder that our voracious appetite for meat is taking a toll on the environment too. The environmental impact of meat production (we're talking mostly the large factory farms) is so extensive that the Union of Concerned Scientists suggests that the best thing you can do for the environment is to eat less meat.

To put it in perspective, the Canada Food Guide says a serving of meat (or fish or poultry) should be about 2.5 to 3 oz. and as little as 1 oz. for a child. A quick search of local restaurant websites shows a lot of 8 oz. and 10 oz. steaks on menus, a serving that could feed a family of four.

What does that mean for the environment?

According to a UN study, the mass production of meat today accounts for 18% of green house gas emissions worldwide. That's more than the combined emissions from planes, trains and automobiles.

Deforestation to create pastureland and to grow crops to feed livestock is another issue. An acre of trees disappears every eight seconds (including rain forest) to create pasture and crop land. Since trees absorb carbon dioxide the impact on global warming is significant.

Factory farms, the source of most meat, pollute a lot. Manure run-off can seep into waterways, a problem that is thought to be behind the deadly E. coli outbreak in Walkerton several years ago that killed six people.

If E. coli in our drinking water worries you consider this: 50% of antibiotics used in Canada are fed to livestock. Cramped quarters in factory farms means diseases are rampant so livestock is fed a steady diet of antibiotics to keep the animals from getting ill.

I could go on and on (ethical issues surrounding the treatment of animals on factory farms, pollution from meat processing plants) but suffice to say that cutting back even a bit on meat consumption could help the earth in many ways. (If Americans ate 10% less meat there would be enough grain left over to feed 60 million people. So in simplified terms there really is a solution to world hunger.)

If reducing the amount of meat you consume poses a challenge in your household, consider these greening action steps:

- Look for organic or naturally-raised meat. Livestock fed a natural, organic diet are happier, healthier and more nutritious.
- Reduce the portion size when you do eat meat and load up on more whole grains and vegetables.
- Try eating one less meat-based meal each week. Substitute meat alternatives like beans for the meat in some of your favourite recipes.