



## **Reducing our Emissions from Diet: Good for Us and Good for the Planet!**

### **Purpose**

This information sheet describes the role that our diet has on our environmental footprint. Somewhat surprisingly, our diet is one of the main contributors to the environmental impact we each have and the amount of emissions we produce. This relates to the types of food we eat as well as how that food is produced.

### **What's the problem?**

Livestock farming is responsible for 14.5% of global human-induced greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, 44% of which is methane, and beef and cattle milk production account for the majority of these emissions (61%). However, beef is the commodity with the highest emission intensity (amount of GHGs emitted per unit of output produced).<sup>1</sup>

Reducing the amount of meat we eat – particularly red meat – and replacing it with healthy plant-based alternatives such as nuts, seeds, wholegrains, beans and legumes has been shown to result in better health for people and will also help climate change through a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. It's a win:win!

### **Why this matters**

In Australia, it has been estimated that consumption of animal products makes up one third of the average Australian's impact on the natural world (our ecological footprint). More than 500 million animals are slaughtered here every year. During their lives ruminant animals like cattle and sheep produce methane which is a greenhouse gas 28 times more potent than carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) and therefore an important contributor to climate change.<sup>2,3</sup>

Currently, Australians consume on average 92kg of meat per person per year.<sup>4</sup> This is three times the recommended dietary amount and three times the global average consumption. If Australians ate less meat, fewer animals would need to be farmed and the amount of methane produced would decrease. Even a small reduction in livestock emissions would make a big difference to our environment because of the potency of methane.

Additionally, half the world's cereals are being grown to feed animals instead of feeding people. Pigs and chickens do not produce greenhouse gases to the same extent as cattle and sheep but they still need to be fed. If we ate less meat of all types, land that is currently used to produce animal feed could be used to feed the world's poor and hungry.

Farming livestock also impacts on water use, mainly through the production of animal feed. To produce 1kg of red meat requires 15,415L of water whereas 1kg of pulses takes 4055L and 1kg of vegetables takes 322L.<sup>5</sup> In a country like Australia with limited fresh water supplies, is livestock agriculture the best use of available water?

Over the last 200 years, Australia has lost 75% of its rainforests and nearly 50% of all forests due to land clearing, much of it for animal agriculture. This has resulted in a reduction in biodiversity, extinction of many species, and land degradation.

Broadly speaking, the more animal protein in your diet, the higher the environmental impact. One study from the UK showed that dietary GHG emissions in people who identify as meat-eaters are approximately twice as high as those in vegans.

### **What you can do**

Simply reduce the amount of meat you eat, either by:

- Having smaller portions of meat in your meals, or
- Eating more meals which do not contain meat at all.

Australian Dietary Guidelines<sup>7</sup> recommend that adults eat no more than 65g of lean, cooked red meat per day – or a maximum of 455g per week. The protein from meat can be replaced with protein from other sources such as peas, beans, lentils and chickpeas. A varied selection of vegetables gives you additional sources of fibre and other nutrients.

Reducing the amount of meat you consume will be good for your health, will reduce your contribution to climate change and will help the planet more generally through providing more food for the poor and causing fewer animals to be raised and slaughtered to feed us.

This information sheet has been adapted from: [www.arrcc.org.au/living\\_the\\_change](http://www.arrcc.org.au/living_the_change)

### **References**

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i3437e.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [www.mla.com.au](http://www.mla.com.au)

<sup>3</sup> [www.epa.nsw.gov.au](http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au)

<sup>4</sup> <https://data.oecd.org/agroutput/meat-consumption.htm>

<sup>5</sup> <https://waterfootprint.org/en/water-footprint/product-water-footprint/water-footprint-crop-and-animal-products/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10584-014-1169-1>

<sup>7</sup> [www.eatforhealth.gov.au](http://www.eatforhealth.gov.au)