



# Kids Can Change the World: Eating Low on the Food Chain

What we eat can have a big impact on the environment

Always remember that deciding what to eat is a very personal matter -- one that you should talk over with your family and your family's doctor. This is because taking care of your body is a very important responsibility -- one you will have for the rest of your life!

But there is another body that supports us all as we go through life, and that is the Earth herself. Because we want the Earth to be in good health, able to support us, it's important to think about how what we eat affects the environment of the Earth.

Currently, most of us with access to a computer also have access to a lot of meat. If you study food webs or food chains, you already know that eating meat is eating high on the food web energy system. In short, each animal we eat must itself eat a LOT of plant food to create and maintain the flesh that we eat as burgers, meat balls, hot dogs, lunch meat, and etc.

## The Problem

You might be surprised to learn that, on modern factory farms, these "food" animals are actually being fed (plant) food that could be fed to humans. Lots of grain like corn and wheat as well as legumes (like soy beans) are fed to cows, pigs, and chickens. This is food that could have fed human beings -- a lot of them!

In fact, a lot *more* human beings could be well fed if we just fed the grain and legumes to humans -- instead of first feeding it to animals and then eating the animals. This is because each animal burns up a lot of the food energy in the grain and legumes (to fuel its movement, breathing, and other life processes) before turning some of it into the meat that gets eaten.

In addition most people in the world can't even afford to buy this meat. Meat simply costs more money than plant food. This is because it costs a lot of money to feed, house, and care for the animal for the year or two before it is "harvested" for food. All this expense, plus the farmer or rancher's own living expenses, adds up to a big price tag. And it is a price tag that many poor people, especially in third world countries, cannot afford.

Unfortunately, when a lot of plant food that could be eaten by humans is fed to animals, that plant food becomes scarcer and more valuable, and therefore more expensive! This means that plant food too becomes harder to afford. And high food prices mean more hungry people. (A similar problem is created when food is used to produce biofuels.)

## The Solution

Now don't worry, no one's suggesting we starve the animals! Naturally we must continue to feed those animals we already have. However, if we could stop raising more and *more* animals every year -- and feeding more and more of the grain and legumes to them -- and instead feed the tons of extra corn, soy beans, and other foods to human beings we could make a significant impact on the hunger problem.

We wouldn't even have to stop eating meat all together -- just cut back. This way, the plant food that the Earth can provide will go farther and be more easily capable of feeding all the children of the world. This means that poor children, in the U.S. and in other lands, might never face a time when there is not enough grain or beans to go around. This is an especially important consideration now that climate change has many scientists concerned that crop failure could cause massive famine in some areas, under our current system.

What's more, a change to a more plant based diet would also mean that right *now* people could stop burning down the rainforest to create new pastures to raise more and more herds of cattle (to provide more and more hamburgers and pot roasts). This would cut down on green house gas emissions (linked to global warming), And leave the habitat intact for those animals that already live there.

Furthermore, if we did not need to grown so much extra food each year, to feed to growing numbers of farm animals, it would save our soil. Soil can actually get used up -- or more exactly, the minerals and other nutrients that plants depend on can get used up. This makes it so that plants do not grow, or if they do grow, they don't produce very large fruits, vegetables, or grain seeds.

For this reason, many farmers feel they have to use chemicals in order to get their plants to grow and to produce a big harvest. This would be fine except many of these chemical fertilizers produce harmful waste products.

## Conclusion

Clearly, over-using the soil can lead to serious problems. *Limiting the amount of food crops we must grow each year (by needing to feed fewer animals destined for the dinner table), means that...*

- Less of our existing farm land will become depleted due to over-use, making it able to continue being used for many generations to come.
- Fewer harmful waste products (from fertilizers used on depleted land) will be seeping into our ground and water, poisoning wild life and people.
- Less natural habitat must be destroyed to create *new* farm land.
- Fewer wild animals will become extinct due to habitat destruction.
- Nutritious plant food will be more available for *human* consumption, making it easier for the world's poor and starving to be fed.

By having more of our meals plant-food-based, rather than meat-based, each of us can do our part to limit damage to our farmlands, halt the destruction of natural habitats and the extinction of wildlife species, and to defuse food scarcity issues that help fuel world hunger.

Just by changing what we eat for dinner, we can have a profound impact on the environment.

## Afterword...

Thank you for taking the time to read this article! We hope you'll think over what's been said here, gather more information, and talk it over with people you know.

Remember that each of us has the responsibility to educate ourselves and to use our best judgment. This applies not only to saving the environment however, but to taking care of our own bodies.

Please do not make a drastic change to your diet (such as reducing or eliminating meat consumption) without first learning how to get the protein and nutrients you need from plant food sources!

### For more information on:

**Addressing World Hunger** <http://www.earthskids.com/hunger.aspx>

**Factory Farming (Caution: this information is grim and sometimes distressing)**  
<http://www.farmsanctuary.org/issues/factoryfarming/>