

- Greenhouse effect / Climate change

Fight climate crisis, save environment by going green

The Sun (Malaysia) · 25 May 2022 · 9 · By Allen Wong Jit Shen Allen Wong Jit Shen is a committee member of the Malaysian Vegetarian Society. Comments: letters@thesundaily.com

If you are looking to reduce your impact on the environment, going vegan is one of the best choices you can make and here is why.

We live on a beautiful planet that has provided us with fresh water to drink, clean air to breathe and fertile soils to grow nourishing food since the dawn of time.

Many eras have gone by and humanity has advanced in technology, making life easier.

As lands continue to be industrialised, our environment is also rapidly transforming for the worse.

We have done more harm than good on the sole habitable planet in our solar system.

If we do not take action to slow the threat of irreversible climate change and environmental degradation, we will lose the majestic lakes and rivers, lush forests, rich soil and other natural resources that sustain our lives on Earth.

Fortunately, we have discovered a more sustainable way of living which is kinder to our planet – veganism.

In case you are still unfamiliar with the term, veganism is a type of diet that excludes meat, dairy and any kind of animal products in favor of plant-based foods.

This diet has presented us with the opportunity to reduce our individual impact on the environment and create a liveable future for us all.

Farming animals for food is one of the leading causes of environmental problems as feeding massive amounts of grain and water to farmed animals and then slaughtering them and processing, transporting and storing their flesh is extremely energy-intensive.

Meat requires a lot of processing before it is suitable for human consumption and requires a lot of energy.

It takes about 31.5 kilowatt-hours of energy to produce one pound of beef, not to mention our food system relies on energy from fossil fuels to grow, prepare and transport food.

Plant-based sources of protein, such as beans and nuts, require much less processing and are therefore much more energy-efficient than meat.

We hear a lot about carbon dioxide emissions in conversations around climate change, but another greenhouse gas plays a significant role in warming our atmosphere – methane.

Methane is 80 times more potent at trapping heat in the atmosphere than carbon dioxide, and it accounts for up to 30% of global warming since preindustrial times.

A majority of human-caused methane emissions come from animal agriculture, with 32% coming from livestock digestion and waste.

This is because cows actually belch out methane while digesting their food. Each year, a single cow belches 220 pounds of methane into the atmosphere. Multiply those emissions by the 1.5 billion cows in our global food system, and it adds up to a dangerous amount of methane in our atmosphere.

It is estimated that humans could cut methane emissions by 45% by shifting to a plant-based diet.

According to an Oxford University study, people who eat meat are responsible for almost 2.5 times as many dietary greenhouse gas emissions per day as vegans.

The study shows that people who eat more than 0.1kg of meat per day, about the size of a deck of playing cards, generate 7.2kg of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) each day, while vegans generate 2.9 kg of CO₂, respectively.

This means, according to this study, the dietary emissions for meat-eaters are 99% to 102% higher than for vegans.

About one-third of the Earth is landmass and is dedicated to raising animals for consumption.

Millions of acres of forested land have been deforested to make room to graze cattle and grow crops for animal feed.

The loss of trees and other vegetation can cause climate change, desertification, soil erosion, fewer crops, flooding, increased greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and a host of problems for animals.

Plant-based agriculture uses a staggering 115 million acres of lesser land compared with animal agriculture.

The same amount of land can be used to produce more grains and vegetables, which in return creates more food to combat world hunger.

A large number of the world population is suffering from undernourishment and food insecurity thanks to our current food system.

Soil degradation and climate change may further disrupt global food production and more people may lose access to the healthy food they need to survive.

If the whole world shifted toward a plant-based diet, we could free up 75% of global farmland that is currently used to graze animals and produce animal feed.

That land could go toward growing healthy, plant-based protein to feed more people and alleviate world hunger. Our planet is paying the price for our human activities, but we have the power to change that.

By changing our food system, we can create a more sustainable food system for us all, without taking away the habitats or homes of thousands of animal species, and a greener, cleaner planet Earth.

Leaving animals off our plate is the single biggest way we can reduce our individual impact on the environment. So, start making the switch today.