

RE: CBC Radio *As it Happens* – Cutting our meat and dairy is the best way to reduce your environmental impact:study

Submitted by: Farm & Food Care Ontario

A recent discussion on CBC Radio's *As It Happens* suggested that the most environmentally-friendly decision a person could make is to cut beef and dairy from their diet, or become entirely vegan. This one-sided discussion did not reflect the reality of beef and dairy farming in Canada and discounts the continuous efforts of Canadian farmers to reduce the environmental footprint of livestock production.

Canadian beef and dairy farmers are committed to providing safe and nutritious food while making management decisions based on stewardship and that support the long-term sustainability of livestock production. Beef production accounts for only 3.6% of Canada's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and 0.04% of the world's GHG emissions, which is comparatively small to beef production in other parts of the world. Advances in animal genetics, production capacity, manure management, diet optimization, and herd management have resulted in a 14% decrease in the greenhouse gas emissions per kilogram of beef between 1981 and 2011. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has noted that global emissions from livestock production could be reduced significantly if the modern practices used by Canadian farmers were adopted more broadly.

Often overlooked are the contributions that livestock makes to reducing food waste, sustainable crop production, carbon-storing, and habitat preservation. Roughly 30% of Canadian cropland is not suited to crop crops but can support grazing livestock. This practice preserves native grasslands (which are significant stores of carbon) and habitats for wildlife while managing invasive species and providing nutrients for the soil. Cattle can be used to reduce food waste, as they can be fed by-products of human food processing or grain that was graded too poorly for human consumption. Manure is a valuable source of fertilizer for cropland and soil organic matter preservation. Without access to manure, more fertilizer would have to be manufactured thus increasing the environmental impact of crop production.

Evaluating the environmental impact of food choices is complicated because of the diversity of agricultural production systems, dietary options, food waste, land use changes and local environmental circumstances, etc. There is a knowledge gap between the science informing climate policy in agriculture and the science informing public nutrition. Until this issue is better understood, it's irresponsible to recommend dietary choices that place disproportionate fault on Canadian livestock farmers and remove nutritious staples from the diets of Canadians.

To learn more about food and farming in Canada, visit www.RealDirtonFarming.ca.

Sincerely,

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