

FOOD AND CLIMATE IN CANADA – A PRIMER

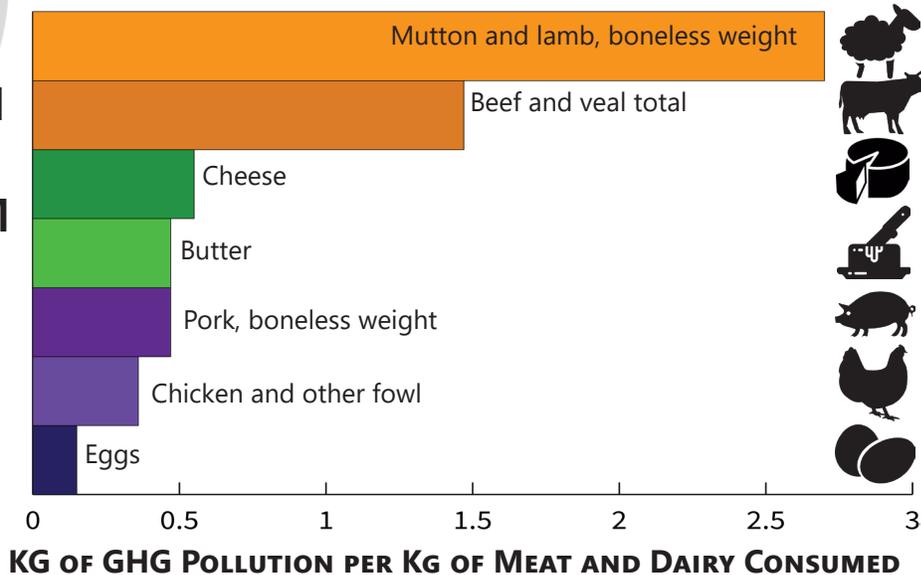
As a major producer of livestock and consumer of meat and dairy products, Canada must do its part to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) pollution from this often-ignored contributor to climate change.

The federal government, and their provincial and territorial counterparts, committed in 2016 to address the connections between food and climate change. The Trudeau government has hinted that this will be addressed in programs such as the Canadian Agricultural Partnership, the revised Canada Food Guide, and a Food Policy for Canada. You can read more about these programs in our Agriculture and Climate backgrounder found at:

www.ecologyottawa.ca/sustainablefood.

However, Canada is currently on track to miss the greenhouse gas reduction targets we committed to in the Paris Agreement. If we are truly committed to minimizing the impacts of climate change, we will need to find opportunities to reduce GHG pollution to zero at some point this century in every sector of the economy. This will inevitably mean confronting the reality that what we put on our plate has a big impact.

KILOGRAMS OF GHG POLLUTION PRODUCED FOR EACH KILOGRAM OF MEAT AND DAIRY CONSUMED BY CANADIANS IN 2016



Many Canadians are unaware of the large emissions footprint of their daily meals. Currently, the average Canadian consumes over 90 Kg of meat and dairy products per year. Multiply that by our population and by the number of kilograms of GHG pollution produced by each meat and dairy type and you get an idea of how large our footprint is as a country.

Globally, livestock production is responsible for 7.1 billion tonnes of GHG pollution per year. This is equivalent to tailpipe GHG pollution from all the world's vehicles. In Canada, agriculture accounted for 72.8 million tonnes a year, or about 8% of our GHG pollution. That is more than all the GHG pollution attributed to our manufacturing and cement production sectors combined if you exclude their energy use.

Although current government initiatives are promising, a strong commitment to address the GHG pollution attributed to our food is far from guaranteed. Governments can become trapped in a cycle of inertia: they fear the backlash of intervention, while low public awareness means they feel less of a need to intervene. We need to hold the government to account and ensure the cuts in GHG pollution achieved by initiatives are commensurate with what the experts are calling for.



"IMPACTS FROM AGRICULTURE ARE EXPECTED TO INCREASE SUBSTANTIALLY DUE TO POPULATION GROWTH INCREASING CONSUMPTION OF ANIMAL PRODUCTS. UNLIKE FOSSIL FUELS, IT IS DIFFICULT TO LOOK FOR ALTERNATIVES: PEOPLE HAVE TO EAT. A SUBSTANTIAL REDUCTION OF IMPACTS WOULD ONLY BE POSSIBLE WITH A SUBSTANTIAL WORLD-WIDE DIET CHANGE, AWAY FROM ANIMAL PRODUCTS."

United Nations Environment Programme



Scientists have known for decades that what we put on our plates is contributing to climate change via land use change, fertilizers, gases from animal digestion, fuel for agricultural machinery and product transportation. Scientists and policy experts alike have been telling us the solution: our diets and the methods we use to grow and distribute food need to change if we are to do our part in avoiding catastrophic and irreversible climate change. Like every other sector of the economy, difficult but necessary changes will be required to make our diets more sustainable.

It is up to us to ensure the federal government resists powerful industry lobbies who are more interested in profit than the health of people and the planet. Unsustainable agricultural methods have been hugely profitable for large corporate players in the agricultural sector for decades. These powerful interests are now actively working to water down food-related actions to address climate change. Specifically, lobby groups for the meat and dairy sectors are up in arms over indications that Canada's next food guide could discourage the consumption of beef, butter, and cheese, and encourage a move toward more plant-based diets.

What could the government do ?

1. Perform environmental and climate impact assessments on the agricultural sector to determine its long-term sustainability;
2. Develop a large-scale national program and a set of rules to move our agricultural sector away from unsustainable practices and excessive meat and dairy production;
3. End subsidies that support unsustainable agriculture and food production practices;
4. Encourage the widespread adoption of sustainable diets through a comprehensive government campaign that reaches all Canadians and that is culturally appropriate;
5. Lead by example and send a clear market signal by ensuring public institutions use their massive purchasing power to buy sustainable food options;
6. Integrate sustainability principles with policies and programs that encourage dietary change (i.e. Canada's Food Guide).

What can you do ?

- **EDUCATE YOURSELF AND OTHERS** - Set a goal to read more on the topic in the coming month
- **ADJUST YOUR DIET**- Transition towards a primarily plant-based diet, avoid beef and dairy as much as possible
- **SHOP SMART** – Aim for zero food waste and buy only what you need
- **GET CIVICALLY ENGAGED** – Talk to your local politicians and tell them you want action on food and climate

While many people are already eating more responsibly, and some farmers are moving away from livestock farming to produce plant-based proteins, these positive changes are not happening at the scale and speed required to avoid irreversible climate change. After all, the global demand for meat alone could virtually guarantee that international aspirations to limit warming to a safe level are not achievable. It's widely acknowledged by experts that government intervention will be necessary to adequately address the problem.

We cannot afford to waste more valuable time and resources on half-measures that will only postpone and increase the cost of the changes that are needed. Canadians expect their government to do what is right on this issue and break the cycle of inactivity that has plagued previous government efforts.

Interested to learn more? Visit www.ecologyottawa.ca/sustainablefood

Sources :

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