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Don't eat meat and save the world?



The beef burger epitomises all the ingredients the modern consumer is hooked on

I am quite intrigued by a reader's response to Mojtaba Tegani's weblog on the World Poultry News.

Tegani's reaction to the United Nation (UN)'s Dr Rajendra Pachauri's prescription on our diet in the face of climate change ('give up meat for one day a week, and you'll do the environment a lot of good') was:

"Is it realistic to expect that a reduction in meat consumption influence factors associated with

climate change? Additionally, will a vegetarian dietary style solve these problems?"

The said reader's response to Tegani's blog: "I think it is all about appropriate scale and management."

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization told us in 2006 that animal manure and some agricultural practices contributed to some 18% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions.

We all have a hand in it. I contribute as well, just by breathing alone.

I agree that issues like antibiotics seepage in soil and water should be looked at closely. But before we allow the consumers to lay the blame solely on the industry practices, let's remind them of our (yes, *our* – because we're all in it) eating habits and our lifestyle.

A rich nation like the United States acquired the taste for meat, poultry and dairy products only as early as the 1920s.

Before that, they ate mainly bread. Before the Industrial Age in the 1800s – and the introduction of the milling plants where wheat could be processed efficiently – bread was not the staple food in Europe or in the US.

People survived on crops other than wheat. They ate things like gruel, porridge and soup. Meat was a delicacy. Bread was the food of the aristocrats.

But meat, like bread, is the kind of luxury that cannot be let go easily once you acquire a taste for it. Even the introduction of sliced wheat bread in the 1930s could not water down the Americans' love for meat. The consumers were hooked on it.

So when you have a capitalist system in place, driven by bottomline, and shaped by the demands of the consumers, how do you think the supply is going to look like? What kind of technology is created and employed to support this cause?

Of course, we can argue that some huge corporations manipulate the markets, and our diets, so we have very little choice but to consume what is on offer.

But we do have a choice. We want meat.

The New York Times reported that the upwardly mobile Chinese have acquired a taste for pork – they, too, are eating more meat.

This is another interesting thing I find about the way the West reports on the good fortunes of the Chinese. It's as if they'll eat through the entire world's food supply, and leave us with nothing at all if they become rich. It's a very Malthusian, dog-eat-dog, point of view that should be left in the Industrial Age, when it first came about.

Had we consume our foods – and our fuel and so on – in moderation, we would not have been in this predicament.

I believe that's what the web reader meant when he mentioned "appropriate scale and management". *Eat* in moderation.

Contact:

Phone:

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The Western media reports on the Chinese as if they'll eat through the entire world's food supply

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