

Reduce Meat Eating to Combat Climate Change, Group Says

By ACSH Staff — December 29, 2015



[1] Genetically Modified Animal
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Eating too red much meat is not only a public health concern, but according to some it's also contributing to the climate change crisis. This is the take-home message from a recently published report by NGO Chatham House, a non-profit organization from the United Kingdom.

In the report, entitled [Changing Climate, Changing Diets](#) [2], the group highlights its recommendations to governments of developing countries for curbing the trend of increasing meat consumption.

The report raises the issue that global patterns of meat consumption are not compatible with climate change goals previously agreed upon at the 2010 United Nations climate change conference in Cancun. It says that the livestock sector contributes almost 15 percent of annual greenhouse gas emissions towards the global total. This figure, the report says, is equivalent to tailpipe emissions from all the world's vehicles.

With global consumption of meat expected to increase 76 percent by 2050, the goal of keeping average global temperature rise below two degrees Celcius may prove difficult.

The report details that excessive consumption of animal products has been linked to obesity, heart disease and Type 2 diabetes. If that's the argument for telling people in advanced countries that better health includes eating less meat, then that's one thing. But if your target audience is the developing world, where issues of food security and accessibility largely dictate what's eaten, then a more persuasive argument is needed.

What's interesting about this 76-page report is that not once was there a mention about using genetically modified (GM) alternatives to combat the issue. If the primary concern is tackling carbon emissions, then perhaps there should be a discussion of how to use GM technology to engineer a solution, like raising cows that produce lower methane emissions.

In 2012, the Australian government launched a three-year [National Livestock Methane Program](#) [3], consisting of 16 research projects aimed at providing producers with practical strategies and tools

to help them lower methane emissions, while increasing productivity and profitability. In August 2015 its findings on genetic technologies to reduce methane emissions from Australian beef cattle were published. With the information and genetic tools developed by the project, it appears cattle producers will be able to buy bulls to breed future generations of cattle with lower methane emissions.

If this technology already exists, then why is not being embraced as a viable option? The closest the Chatham House report came to advocating any form of scientific intervention was its acknowledgement of efforts to develop new, plant-based meat alternatives. However, these "lab grown" meat products will not be commercially available for public consumption anytime soon.

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